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THE HARDCORE
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theft
auto**

Vice City

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HONOR**
PACIFIC ASSAULT™

The stunning sequel is here!
PC ZONE gets the full story

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

**CHAMPIONSHIP
MANAGER**

The greatest footie
game ever is back!
The definitive
verdict inside

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**DEFINITIVE
REVIEWS**

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KINGS:
BATTLES
TOCA RACE
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POSTAL 2
L-2:
FORGOTTEN
BATTLES
FREELANCER**

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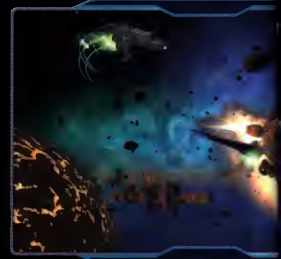


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-- IGN Action Vault ign.com

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-- Gamespy.com

Homelanfed
86/100

Actionvault
"Very Good"

Gamespy
84/100

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Cycling Manager 3



Enigma: Rising Tide



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Heath



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Runaway



The Watchmaker



www.gmxmedia.net

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GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY P32

Massive six-page playtest of the biggest, baddest and ballsiest sequel ever

The Good, The Bad And The Painful



Being the editor of a games magazine brings with it a certain amount of kudos.

For example, when you're out drinking after work you can demand that your colleagues buy you drinks, with the immortal words "I'm the boss, I'm quite thirsty and your appraisal is due next week."

You can also maintain that you're right even when you're obviously not. (The trick is to wait until your colleagues have gone home, change it to how they wanted it in the first place and then take the credit for it afterwards with your publisher.)

And, of course, you get to handpick the press trips you go on:

1. "What's that? A day trip to Smethwick? On the coach?"

To see an add-on pack for *MS Flight Sim*? You know I'd love to but I've got to stay in the office. The magazine doesn't edit itself you know."

2. "New York? For five days over deadline? To see our cover game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* for an afternoon and spend the rest of the time in a designer hotel or scouting the Lower East Side for obscure Japanese trainers? The name on the passport is..."

But before you start sharpening your CV can I just say that it's not all champagne cocktails and first class flights. I also ended up going to Berlin for a conference this month, where I managed to get myself lost and ended up walking the streets until daylight trying to remember the name of my hotel (no fun), where I snatched 30 minutes sleep thus almost missing my flight home and leaving my coat behind for the chambermaid, before stumbling back into work to face a day of meetings and publishers shouting at me.

But if it still sounds like your idea of a dream job then far be it from me to try and put you off. We get hassled daily by people wanting to know how to break into the heady world of games journalism and this month we decided to regurgitate all our secrets, starting on page 122. You could be sitting in my seat in a few years time. But you'll have to fight Martin Korda for it first and that entails a whole new world of pain.

Dave Woods
Editor



PCZONE
ISSUE 128



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4 P56

Cancel everything! The world's first definitive review of the year's most anticipated game is here. Turn to page 56 to read our in-depth verdict.

COVER DISKS P128



■ 4 EXCLUSIVE DEMOS

Championship Manager 4, Devastation, Warrior Kings: Battles and Praetorians multiplayer

7 OTHER PLAYABLE DEMOS INCLUDING...

Bandits: Phoenix Rising multiplayer and single-player demos, Praetorians, TOCA Race Driver, Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis, Alex Ferguson's Player Manager 2003, Uplink and Laser Squad Nemesis

■ DVD EXCLUSIVE: DVD ZONE

4 demos not on the CDs, including Casino Inc, Tropic 2: Pirate Cove, Warrior Kings: Battles Public Demo and an updated build of the Unreal Tournament 2003 demo that allows you to play against owners of the full game.

All the featured mods in ModWatch. New patches for Battlefield 1942, Command & Conquer: Generals, Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault - Spearhead, Neverwinter Nights, No One Lives Forever 2, SimCity 4 and Splinter Cell. Exclusive DVD-Video feature on Shiny's Enter The Matrix with 9 minutes of in-game footage. Plus all the other latest and essential patches, movies and more.

Also exclusive to our DVD are DVD Zone Screenshot Packs, Wallpaper Packs, Essential Programs, Essential Drivers for the latest graphics cards and Essential Patches including archived patches from all the biggest PC titles.



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THE ALL NEW PC TRAIN-SIM MAGAZINE

PCZONE

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WIN! **THE COMPO NO ONE FINDS** - Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: The Compo No One Finds (128), PC ZONE, 50 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing Date: May 1, 2003. The winner of our March cover (126) is Mr Anthony Guddard of Oxford. Well done.

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Out with the old...

FIRST
Look!

EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD



Stainless Steel Studios goes cow crazy in its new historical RTS

BOVINE BERSERKER Keith Pullin

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Stainless Steel Studios
PUBLISHER Activision
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q4 2003
WEBSITE www.stainlesssteelstudios.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the makers of *Empire Earth*
- Brand new one-click tech-tree interface
- Multiple, unique civilisations
- Innovative military attack concepts
- Historically accurate and fun (is it really possible?)

AS ANY keen Monty Python fan will tell you, the best way to upset your medieval adversaries is to propel the rotting corpse of a cow into the middle of their village. Stainless Steel Studios, maker of *Empire Earth* has taken this particular pearl of wisdom to heart, because in *Empires: Dawn Of The Modern World* you can do just that.

The curious animal fetish doesn't stop there either. With battle oxen that can be loaded with explosives and then detonated in an enemy stronghold, the emphasis is well and truly on creating an RTS experience that doesn't quite follow the usual rules. Yet, what makes this offbeat approach all the more surprising is that these inhumane military ploys actually happened in real life.

In fact Stainless Steel has spent over a year researching these bizarre tactics to come up with a game that covers five time periods across 1,000 years of history, starting with the Middle Ages. The ultimate aim is to create something that's historically accurate, yet at the same time original and enjoyable.

"The thing to remember about *Empires*," says lead designer Rick Goodman, "is that the game has a number of unique civilisations all designed from scratch to be totally different from one another."

By way of example, Goodman demonstrated an early Korean civilisation using fireworks as a sort of ancient rocket launcher. We then witnessed a German army using 'Rommel's Battlefield Deception', which caused all the opposing soldiers to run around in circles shooting each other. Needless to say,



It's Germany versus England again, and as usual it's the innocent that suffer.



English troops prepare to launch exploding cattle into an enemy fortress.



Will Germans forever be associated with bloody great tanks?

launching fermenting cow carcasses into enemy troops is a purely English affair.

TECH CHECK

The gameplay itself is divided equally between resource management and combat. Goodman is currently unwilling to divulge exactly how many civilisations there will be in the final game, but with the multiplayer count currently at eight, our guess is it's likely to be around that. There is an announcement on this due in April, and we'll let you know for sure as soon as we find out.

Thankfully, chatting about the technology is not so taboo. Again, Stainless Steel can boast something of a first here, as the game will include a

system known as 'one-click technology'. This means that when your civilisation learns a new tech, it appears as an icon at the top left of the screen, allowing you to instantly click and activate it.

"We've completely redesigned the technology tree in this game," claims Goodman. "It doesn't work like any other strategy game currently on the market."

Graphically, Stainless Steel's new game looks pretty similar to *Empire Earth*, so if we're completely honest we doubt the visuals will be as groundbreaking as the gameplay. But there's still a long way to go before *Empire's* release late this year – and anyway, who needs state-of-the-art eye candy when you've got a game concept to die for? **EW**



The Korean navy's vessels have the unique ability of being able to simultaneously fight and transport other units.

NAVY

As well as powerful navies, there will be airborne units to take the fight to the skies.

UNIQUE ABILITIES

Each civilisation will possess unique weapons, units and special abilities. The Koreans are masters of melee combat.



HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Stainless Steel Studios has devoted an extraordinary amount of time to ensure the battles are as historically accurate as possible.

INNOVATION

The exploding battle ox is just one of dozens of incredible new attacks.

CAMERA

Although Empires is essentially a 2D isometric affair, you can rotate the camera for a better view.



ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

MEDAL OF HONOR

Exclusive! PC Zone ships out to San Francisco for the huge scoop on *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault*, the next chapter in the WWII shooter series

FROM THE FRONTLINE

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Hi there. We begin this month's groovy Bulletin section in fine style with an exclusive story on EA's new *Medal Of Honor* game, *Pacific Assault*. Although screenshots are still under wraps at this early stage, our man Anthony Holden had exclusive access to the development team and the game's senior producer Matt Powers in San Francisco – you can read his morse code-translated report beginning on this page.

As a special treat for adventure fans, this issue we have an exclusive interview with Sean Clark, producer of the new LucasArts adventure *Full Throttle 2* (page 12). Along with *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* from Revolution, *FT2* will hopefully help reinvigorate the once-proud adventure genre.

However, one of the biggest events in the gaming calendar happened in San Jose, California, US of A, between March 4 and 8 – the Game Developers Conference. PC ZONE sent fearless reporter Jon Jordan to check out what was happening at the cutting edge of PC games development, and he didn't disappoint, with exciting news of *Final Fantasy XI*, a *Total Annihilation* sequel and stories of Argonaut's Jez San and his Paul Daniels impressions (page 16).

In Bulletin we also have the new VU Games 2003 line-up (page 21), new shots of Codemasters' *Colin McRae Rally 3* and *Indy Car Series* (page 14), a report on Starbreeze (developer of *Enclave*) and its striking new project *Templar* (page 13), and the chance to win a year's supply of Xplosiv games (Page 15). Plus there's our regular look at the monthly PC charts, old-skool gaming in Emulation Zone, and razor-sharp industry tittle-tattle in The Man Who Knows. Enjoy.



This time it's the Japanese who'll be on the receiving end.

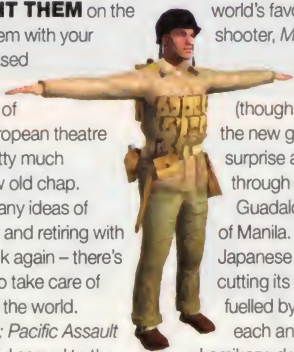
YOU'VE FOUGHT THEM on the beaches, poked them with your spearhead and chased Jerry right back into the black heart of Nazi Berlin. The European theatre of operations is pretty much sorted – good show old chap. But before you get any ideas of putting your feet up and retiring with a box of cigars, think again – there's a whole other war to take care of on the other side of the world.

Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault is the freshly unveiled sequel to the

world's favourite WWII shooter, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. Once again putting you in the shoes of a plucky (though as yet unnamed) US soldier, the new game will take you from the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour through such battles as Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal and the liberation of Manila. This time, the Imperial Japanese war machine is viciously cutting its way through South East Asia, fuelled by a blind fanaticism that turns each and every soldier into a fearless kamikaze death machine. It's going to be

a very different war, one that'll make conflict in Europe look like a Mediterranean holiday.

PC ZONE had exclusive access to the *Medal Of Honor* team in San Francisco, and took the chance to chat with Matt Powers, senior producer on the title, about what we can expect from this massive sequel. "It's still *Medal Of Honor* but it's going to have a very different feel this time round," says Powers. "The sense of being in a jungle battle is very different from battling in a city. We want to give that kind of immersion, give you the feeling that the



THE SPOILS OF WAR

THE MEDAL OF HONOR WAR MACHINE ROLLS OUT TWO MORE PC EXPANSION PACKS

Apart from *Pacific Assault*, EA actually announced four other new *Medal Of Honor* titles at the event, two for console and two for PC. One is to be a straight follow-up to *Pacific Assault*, essentially part two of the campaign in the Pacific, to appear in 2005. But more immediately, there's to be a second expansion pack for *Allied Assault* out in June, to follow on from *Spearhead*. The new add-on will take you through a selection of missions in Italy and North Africa. Details are sparse, but Matt Powers assures us we'll see some quite bizarre real-life weapons emerging. "One of the coolest things

in the expansion pack is a bazooka with a giant shoulder-pad. It looks like a science fiction thing."

Focus will also be put on expanding multiplayer gameplay.

Says Matt: "It's a goal of ours to make it backwards compatible, so you can go back to, say, *Spearhead* game maps and play with the new Italian characters and weapons.

We want to continue doing this so it increases the online gameplay with every new title that comes out."

This new expansion doesn't have a name as yet, but we'd like to take this opportunity to propose the title *Medal Of Honor: They Don't Like It Up 'Em*. Just like the old days.

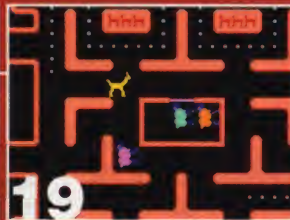




FULL THROTTLE 2
Exclusive LucasArts interview



SPECIAL REPORT
The Game Developers Conference



EMULATION ZONE
What's hot in emu's world



PC ZONE CHARTS
Latest charts and release dates

GOES EAST

Japanese soldiers could be anywhere. And the way the Japanese fight, as well, is really different. They'll use more camo, trapdoors, and tunnels. You'll be going into tunnel systems to root them out."

Though the game is still in pre-production, the team has a good grip on where it's headed. The idea seems to be to repeat the formula of *Allied Assault*, giving fans more of what they want, rather than reinventing the wheel. But at the same time, the Pacific setting can't help but produce up a huge number of new gameplay features, weapons and mission objectives.

"We're making sure the player recognises the environment as part of the gameplay. It's a big part of the immersion – it's important for making you feel like you're there," continues Powers. "But at the same time *Medal Of Honor* is about the story, about progressing through the war, completing objectives, shooting guys, blowing big stuff up, using cool vehicles – those are the things people expect more out of *Medal Of Honor*."

TECHNOLOGY OF WAR

As with *Allied Assault* and its PlayStation 2 cousin *Frontline*, *Pacific Assault* is mirrored

you. "We're also doing a lot more with lighting, with night missions and flares and so on. Water is a big part of it, everywhere you go you've got rivers, you've got streams and you've got puddles"

As for the firepower, *Pacific Assault* will see a whole new set of weaponry in the hands of the Allied forces. "There's no end of interesting and funky weapons from the Pacific. We're going to have flamethrowers,

"There's no end of interesting and funky weapons. We're even going to have flamethrower tanks"

MATT POWERS
SENIOR PRODUCER, EA

and even flamethrower tanks – just big tanks with giant flamethrowers coming out of the end," adds Powers.

PASS THE ELASTOPLAST

The *Medal Of Honor* development team is also working towards a more realistic gaming environment, especially with regards to the player, your fellow troops and being injured during a firefight. "What we're looking at is more bandaging of wounds. We're trying to get away from having little

bits of health everywhere that break the immersion, so instead you call a medic. You push the medic key and on your compass you have a little medic thing appear where he is. You can go find him, or if you wait long enough he'll get to you."

Powers added that *Pacific Assault* will allow you to carry your fallen comrades, and rescue injured soldiers and squad mates from the clutches of the enemy. If you can lump them back to a medic, or protect them long enough for one to reach you, then they'll get patched up and be able to fight once again by your side. *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* is currently scheduled for a January 2004 release, so watch this space for more revelations on one of the biggest games of next year.



■ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
■ **Developer:** Electronic Arts
■ **ETA:** January 2004
■ **Website:** www.ea.com

BEAST MASTER

New screenshots of *Black & White II* moisten world's trousers

BLIMEY. JUST WHEN we thought we couldn't get any more excited about *Black & White II*, Peter Molyneux goes and releases a set of simply stunning images at the Game Developers Conference in San Jose, USA.

As we commented in our exclusive preview back in issue 125, *Black & White II* should surpass the original strategy god game, with a simplified player interface, an enhanced

spell system, massive battles involving thousands of soldiers and huge, beautifully detailed new creatures for you to groom and make your own. And if you had any lingering doubts about that, just look at these two shots.

We'll have more on *Black & White II* very soon but for now you can read more about Peter Molyneux in *PC ZONE's* manic visit to the Game Developers Conference on page 16.



Thousands of troops do battle with your titanic creatures.



"Look, I like you, but can't we just be friends?"

Night missions will be tense.

by a console version called *Rising Sun*, but Matt stresses that they will be very different games. "We're sharing Pearl Harbour, which is going to be a huge intense battle like the Normandy landing from *Allied Assault* and we're sharing some of the other islands and battlegrounds too, but we're writing our own design," says Powers. "We're also re-writing all our tech for the PC version. Not only because the technology keeps changing, but with the Pacific environment you've got lots of foliage – grasses and plants and trees."

The dense environment means that players will be able to use cover much better, so if you're hidden in the bushes you'll be harder to see, and enemies will miss you more often when they shoot at

SHORTS

PACK OF WOLVES



Fans of popular RPG *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* will be howling with glee at the announcement of a second add-on pack from Bethesda. *Bloodmoon* throws you into the world of Solstheim, a frozen island crawling with frost trolls and other ice monsters. Most exciting is the addition of werewolves – your character can turn into one to become the latest member of the pack. Ubi Soft will release *Bloodmoon* in May.

BLACK9 REVEALED



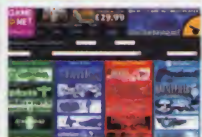
Taldren, developer of the *Star Trek: Starfleet Command* series, has announced a new title using the *Unreal* engine. *Black9* is a dark, sci-fi third-person adventure with RPG elements set in 2080. No UK publisher as yet, but *Black9* should hopefully be released by Christmas. Check out the website for more info – www.black-9.com.

FOUR-MULA ONE RACING



F1 Challenge '99-'02 is Electronic Arts' latest fully-licensed driving game, and will feature all the teams, drivers and vehicles from four full seasons. EA says the game will have advanced damage modelling and a multiplayer mode. Due for release in May, we'll have more on this next month.

YOU GOT GAME.NET?



Videogame retailer GAME has recently launched a multiplayer gaming portal available for £24.99 a year, or £9.99 for three months. GAME.net gives subscribers access to more than 50 online games as well as providing dedicated nights for new users, live online help, the latest demos, mods and updates, email and web hosting facilities, and the chance to buy one of nine PC games for up to half-price.

Hell's Angel

EXCLUSIVE! PC ZONE CHATS TO THE DIRECTOR OF *FULL THROTTLE 2*, SEAN CLARK

EIGHT YEARS after the original cult classic, *Full Throttle 2* will be revving up on PC next year courtesy of LucasArts. "It's an evolution from the first game," says the game's director, Sean Clark, to *PC Zone*. "You can actually get in fist fights – which is pretty cool."

Set in the same desolate retro-future, the sequel is considerably larger than the original. A damsel in distress is harassed by a biker gang, and in his inimitable style, biker hero Ben sorts them out. However, he's quickly embroiled in a plot hatched by a mystery figure bent on destroying the town for oil.

Full Throttle was primarily an adventure game with some action elements thrown in for good measure, but Clark says that the team is "trying to push on the action stuff a little bit so it's not just a 'roam around and explore' kind of a game". Motorcycle combat is the other half of the action equation, with players able to punch, kick and

employ the occasional weapon to knock their adversaries from their petrol-guzzling steeds.

The humour remains, and as before is as much visual as it is verbal. One pint-sized rider straps phone books to his seat in order to reach the handlebars, but most of the verbal gags, of course, come from Ben. "Not in a wacky kind of way, but in a dry humour kind of way," says Clark. "I think we've been very true to that."

The Kickstand Bar is still there in all its rustic, a-slight-breeze-will-knock-it-down splendour. And other levels will take place in a huge blimp (the design sketches show a huge dirigible – clearly incapable of flight – propped up by giant turbine engines), a converted drive-in, and a riverboat that doubles as an oil rig.

Each motorcycle gang is infused with its own unique personality, and each has a different style of attacking and defending. The Hound Dogs, for example, are rockabilly bikers with their leader

riding what Clark describes as "a two-wheeled Cadillac". The Wraiths have a Samurai theme – Kurosawa meets Harley-Davidson – with a leader that rides a sleek-looking hog festooned with traditional Japanese banners.

Eight years later, and clearly something about *Full Throttle*'s Ben endures. "He's just a cool character," offers Clark. "He speaks with his fists, but at the same time, he's the moral centre of the universe created in the game." Through it all, Clark hopes players will latch onto Ben's personality and dry sense of humour. "I have experience writing games that were deemed kinda funny," he adds. "Sometimes even intentionally funny."

■ Publisher: Activision
 ■ Developer: LucasArts
 ■ ETA: 2004
 ■ Website: www.lucasarts.com



How Martin Korda got involved in this is anyone's guess.



"Hold him down Cleetus, it's time for a coe-ionic rodeo."

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

SPECTRUM IS GREEN! *CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS* COMES TO PC

GERRY ANDERSON'S cult 1960s sci-fi puppet TV show starring Captain Scarlet has been turned into a PC game by developer Batfish Studios. *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons* is a new tactical action game involving isometric 3D battles against Captain Black and the sinister alien group known as the Mysterons.

"It's much like the TV series in the way the game is structured," Philip Harris, lead developer at Batfish tells *PC ZONE*. "There'll be 14 playable episodes, with an intro screen for each level. We reckon it'll really capture the feel and excitement of the programme."



Players will have squad-based control over Captain Scarlet and the other five Spectrum agents, and will be able to use weapons such as the Angel team's air-strikes, and vehicles including the SPV or Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle.

However, Harris said that the trademark puppet 'wobble' won't appear in the game. "You never saw them walk in the series – except on conveyor belts and suchlike. We've gone for realistic motion-captured movement for characters." More news soon.

■ Publisher: Digital Workshop
 ■ Developer: Batfish Studios
 ■ ETA: Summer
 ■ Website: www.batfishstudios.com



The game will use many of the original voices.



Let's hope *Puppetry Of The Penis* isn't next up.



Templar is mostly about dispatching enemies.



A fiery chasm! The bridge of doom! Lord save us all!

TEMPLARS OF DOOM

STARBREEZE UNVEILS MEDIEVAL ACTION-ADVENTURE *TEMPLAR*

SWEDISH DEVELOPER Starbreeze has been vigorously polishing its sword for the release of its new title *Templar* later this year. A third-person medieval adventure featuring a bold Knight of the Templar known as Paul de Raque, the game's emphasis is very much on hacking the limbs off as many poor souls as physically possible.

"We're emphasising the realistic, heavy sword-and-axe combat, with up-close and personal attacks like head-butts and kicks," says producer Daniel Willfor. "The focus is on fighting, but there is also a role-playing style skill system incorporated where you'll be able to

upgrade several abilities and develop Paul's character as you progress."

Your hero will travel through Europe and the Holy Land in an ultimate fight between good and evil, solving fiendish puzzles and encountering enemies such as dark knights and the Saracens. How very sensitive. "Paul can use handheld weapons like swords, axes and morning stars, the very deadly bow, and the occasional fast knee to the groin," continues Willfor. "In this nightmare world you can also use divine powers that will burn demons to cinders."

Templar will use the acclaimed *Enclave* engine that produced gorgeous

gothic buildings, beautiful torch-lit interiors and detailed characters.

Speaking of *Enclave* – Starbreeze's last project – the PC version is still in UK release limbo due to German publisher Swing! going tits-up. But this hasn't deterred Starbreeze, as the team has recently announced a sequel, *Enclave II*. Hopefully, they'll pick up a new publisher very soon – in the meantime check out all these games at the website below.

■ **Publisher:** TDK
■ **Developer:** Starbreeze/O3
■ **ETA:** Q4 2003
■ **Website:** www.o3games.com



"Is it just me, or is the GeForce elf really hot?"

Anthony Holden, PC ZONE.
Yes Anthony, it is just you.

"We are delighted to have earned such a prestigious award."

Paul Jackson, managing director of EA UK, after the company was rated ninth best to work for in a Sunday Times survey – three places behind Timpsons the key cutters.

"Bukkazoom takes cart racing to a whole new level."

Danish company ITE promotes its new PC game based on Hugo cartoon characters. The company's previous efforts include delightful kids title *Stinky & Beaver*

"The domain name and website were surrendered to US law enforcement pursuant to a federal prosecution... for conspiracy to violate criminal laws."

The message the US government left on isonews.com after closing it down. The owner now faces five years in the clink and a \$500,000 fine for selling mod chips.

COMPETITION XPLOSIV

Win free Xplosiv PC games for a whole year!

DYNAMITE COMPO COULD NET YOU A YEAR'S WORTH OF GAMES

MAKING THEIR WAY to a games emporium near you this very second are seven new PC re-releases from budget games company Xplosiv, including Sega's arcade hit *Crazy Taxi*, and Activision's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*. To celebrate this new range of cracking PC games (available at £4.99 and £9.99), the generous people at Xplosiv have not only agreed to give three lucky readers the chance to win the latest seven titles, but also every Xplosiv release for the rest of 2003!

Yep, this means you'll immediately get your paws on Sega *Marine/Bass Fishing*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Gabriel Knight 3*, *Ultra 3D Pinball*, *Hexen 2* and *Shanghai 2nd Dynasty*, PLUS the complete Xplosiv line-up for 2003 as and when they go on sale. Last year the company released more than 30 titles, so by Christmas, you – yes, you sir at the back with the beard – could have a games collection that'll make your best friends puke black bile with envy.

Fancy a punt? Well, to enter the competition all you have to do is answer the Xplosiv question below and send it on a postcard to the usual PC ZONE address.



WHO INVENTED DYNAMITE (THE EXPLOSIVE)?

A: Alfred Nobel
B: Wile E Coyote
C: Ms Dynamite

Send your answer on a postcard, along with with all the information requested, to the address below:

■ Please include your name, address, daytime phone number and email address (and age if under 18).

■ Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd.

■ Please indicate whether or not you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

Send your entry to: Xplosiv Competition, PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland St, London W1T 4JD. (Closing date: Thursday, April 3, 2003).

Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

GERMAN PUBLISHER CDV has openly accused Britain's students of being a worthless generation of slack-jawed cretins with little more than basic motor neurone functions to drag them through three years of sexual and narcotic excess. The Teutonic company issued the broadside at Blighty's boffins following a spurious survey intended solely for game publicity for the recently released continental invasion simulator, *American Conquest*.

Apparently, the results of the US History survey revealed a shocking lack of knowledge among the UK student population, with the average respondent managing a pitiful 39 per cent – the equivalent of a fail at exam level. CDV claims 57 per cent of respondents didn't know who America was named after, and that 65 per cent were unaware which treaty signalled the end of the War of Independence. Perhaps more disturbingly, 12 per cent thought that Benjamin Franklin invented a cardboard fireguard, and four per cent believed that George Washington was once President of a zoo.

One hapless respondent went as far as to suggest that Pennsylvania was named after Hollywood actor Sean Penn. Marketing manager Leo Zullo wrote: "We're confident that these students would score much higher after playing *American Conquest*. It's fun to play but also informative, and there's an obvious gap in knowledge about this hugely important period in history within the UK's university students." According to another independent survey, 100 per cent of respondents had little or no interest in *American Conquest*.

Multimillionaire developer Peter Molyneux has been captured by the BBC begging for money. The Lionhead head, who says he made ten million pounds from *Black & White*, urged the Government to help fund game development.

"Making a computer game now is incredibly expensive," Molyneux moaned. "You're talking about millions and millions of pounds to make a triple-A, globally successful game. A few developers are really, really struggling. The small independents are the creators of all the fresh ideas and that's definitely going to suffer. You are going to see less of the creative, out-there ideas that turn into the compulsive properties later. With a bit of help from government, you could see those developers becoming a significant revenue source. It's well known that Britain leads the world in development. There's no other place on earth with our concentration of development talent." Who needs Japan when you've got Guildford?

"Four per cent believed that George Washington was once President of a zoo"

Talk to the Animals

EX-COMMANDOS TEAM UNLEASH THE LORD OF THE CREATURES

SPANISH DEVELOPER Avirago, set up by members of the respected *Commandos* team at Pyro Studios, has announced its first original project. *The Lord Of The Creatures* is an RTS game that allows players to take control of a range of bizarre magical creatures to fight and conquer a world dominated by competing warlords.

"Our aim is to create a unique gameplay experience, seen through images as if taken from paintings and fantastic illustrations," says project director Jon Beltran de Heredia. "The description we are handling internally is 'tactical command of war creatures', encompassing the tactical aspect of the combat and the emphasis on the creatures."

Players explore forests, swamps, caverns and deserts to discover useful beasts – such as giant wasps – that possess different fighting abilities that you won't discover until you use them in combat. You'll also be able to cast spells including 'replica' that creates a number of images of your warrior to confuse and bewilder foes.

"We're also planning on implementing several types of multiplayer gameplay, including tournaments, duels and competitions as competitive modes, and collaboration in conquest as a cooperative mode," continues Beltran de Heredia. *The Lord Of The Creatures* is scheduled for release in 2005.

■ Publisher: TBA ■ Developer: Avirago
■ ETA: 2005 ■ Website: www.avirago.com



Who is the best Lord? Flies, Rings, Dance or Creatures?

CODEMASTERS GETS THE CHEQUERED FLAG

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3 AND INDYCAR SERIES ON STARTER'S ORDERS

CODEMASTERS HAS just released new images and info on its forthcoming racing titles. The most eagerly awaited, *Colin McRae Rally 3*, lacks an official World Rally Championship licence, meaning its courses have been designed purely to deliver the best rally driving experience possible. The dream car-handling that epitomises the series remains intact, delivered pixel-perfect to the PC. The dour Scot is again joined by sidekick Nicky Grist in their Ford Focus, with Mitsubishi Lancers and Subaru Imprezas among the other driveable cars.

Second up on the grid is *Indy Car Series*, a super-fast racing game based on the USA open-wheel championship, which incorporates the world famous Indy 500 event.

As well as being able to support a whopping 33 cars on track at once, *IndyCar's* main innovation is a realistic AI system, which sees other drivers adapting to conditions in real-time, rather than blindly following set racing lines.

Stop Press: Rumour has it that Codemasters is soon to confirm *Operation Flashpoint 2* – watch this space.

■ Publisher: Codemasters
■ Developer: Codemasters
■ ETA: Summer
■ Website: www.codemasters.com

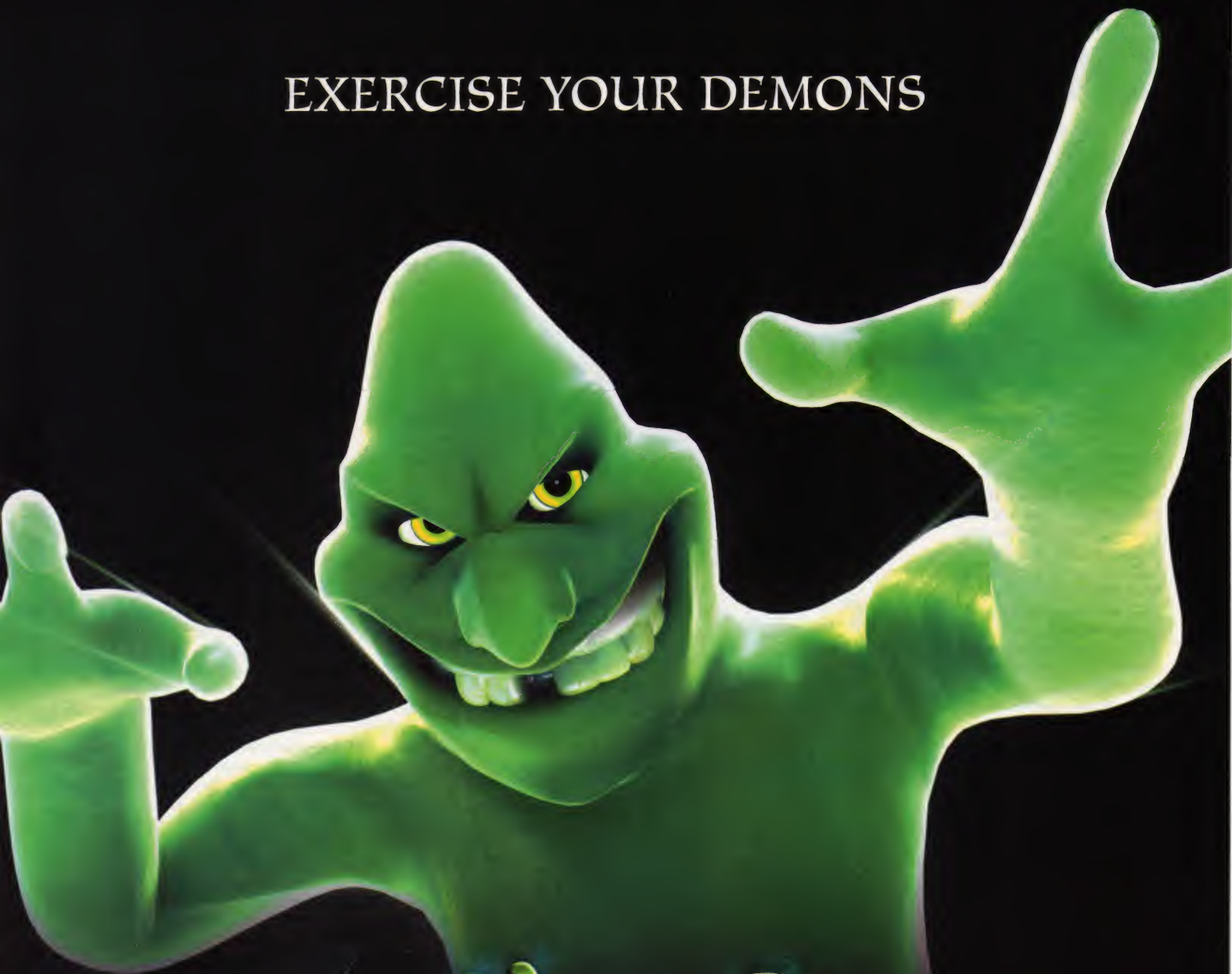


Indy Car Series – we've played it and it's fast.



Colin McRae Rally 3. Mmmm... donuts.

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DO YOU KNOW THE WAY TO

LIKE BEING AT UNIVERSITY BUT WITH MORE BEER AND FEWER BIRDS, THE GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE IS THE PLACE DEVELOPERS GO TO LEARN HOW TO IMPROVE THEIR GAMES. PC ZONE SENT JON JORDAN TO SOAK UP MORE THAN JUST THE ATMOSPHERE...

"MAKE BETTER GAMES." It's this simple, but important phrase on the front of the Game Developers Conference 2003 brochure that epitomises the spirit of what is becoming an increasingly important event in the gaming calendar. Held in San Jose, USA, the GDC continues to attract the big hitters of gaming world, which is why it's a useful place to check the pulse of the industry and pick up a bit of gossip on the side.

Comprising five days of tutorials and lectures on subjects as varied as Optimised Stencil Shadow Buffers (woo-hoo!) through to Alternative Business Models for Online Games, as well as a three day technology expo, The Game Developers Conference is a pretty busy event. But as with most of these shows, the real business and news gets generated in the aftershow bars and parties. After all, there aren't many times or places you'll find Will Wright, Warren Spector, Jez San, Peter Molyneux and Xbox creator Seamus Blackley all supping at their pints together...

TUESDAY MARCH 4

The opening day is quiet – which gives us time to recover from an 18-hour trip from London, which included a delay in Chicago as our plane's right engine started making a noise like a bag full of broken spanners. We begin proceedings with a Running Massively Multiplayer Games tutorial featuring Sony Online Entertainment's director of development Rich Vogel.

Vogel says the launch is the critical period for massively multiplayer games because if players stop, they never rejoin. For example, he reckons *Ultima's* launch cost Electronic Arts around US\$40million in lost revenue. For this reason *Star Wars Galaxies* will be carefully controlled –



These guys just can't stop coding - even during the coffee breaks they're at it.

400,000 people have pre-ordered but they won't all get a copy in the launch week as it would overwhelm the game's servers.

Afterwards, back in the bar, the main topic of conversation is Nokia's N-Gage gaming phone, which is on display for the first time in the US at the show. Most people remain sceptical about its success. Later on, there's a minor riot just down the road from the hotel – as far as we know it's nothing to do with Scottish developer VIS and its talk on State Of Emergency.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 5

We begin the day chilling at the back of game designer Noah Falstein's talk on brainstorming. Falstein claims sleeping on a problem is a good way to solve it – it

certainly works for us. After a nap, we join the Making a AAA Game Development Deal talk, in which Mike Kulas from *Red Faction* creator Volition, role-plays as a star developer in contract negotiations with a large French publisher. "I don't want to be paid in their stock. It's worthless," Kulas remarks, candidly.

Later that evening, the entertainment comes courtesy of ATI, which is announcing its new range of Radeon cards. Senior VP, Rick Bergman, claims the top card has at least a 50 per cent performance advantage over NVIDIA's top. As well as free beer, he gives us all a flashing red pen, so we believe him.

THURSDAY MARCH 6

The red of yesterday is replaced by toxic green, as NVIDIA gets its opportunity to reply. "DirectX 9 for US\$79," crows CEO Jen-Hsun Huang as he reveals the GeForce FX 5200. "We will regain our performance leadership," he predicts, taking the opportunity to show a demo of Disney's *Tron 2.0* game, which looks fantastic. Huang admits the peculiar heatsink on the original GeForce FX boards was his idea.

Surprisingly, both NVIDIA and ATI had Square's online role-playing game *Final Fantasy XI* on show – which proved to be very smart indeed. Originally a Japanese PlayStation 2 release, Square's first online venture is still a way off a UK release, but most of the English voices are in place and the graphics have been given a spit-and

polish with gorgeous particle effects and expansive environments set in the world of Vana'diel.

Away from the show floor, there are plenty of technology companies showing off their wares. Physics middleware vendor Havok is demonstrating its new ragdoll animation system (as seen in last month's special report), while AMD is bigging up the benefits of its 64-bit CPUs. But as always, the most impressive demo comes from Epic. The company is showing the latest build of the *Unreal* engine. Despite using relatively low polygon models, a technique called "spherical harmonic lighting" means the detail on both environment and characters is staggering. The only downside is games using the technology won't be released for another few years.

The evening brings us to the Game Developers Choice Awards. It's not a great year for either PC or UK developers, but the Brit end is upheld thanks to Computer Artworks' innovation award for the trust system in *The Thing*. The biggest cheer of the night though is for the audio award – winner *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* – although the dubbing on the videoclips is about half a second out of sync. Whoops...

FRIDAY MARCH 7

Gas Powered Games is swamping GDC with talks on *Dungeon Siege* and so chief gasser Chris Taylor's talk is well attended. He manages to say little of interest on his chosen subject, Lessons Learnt On *Dungeon Siege* but is entertaining and remarkably foul-mouthed nevertheless. "*Dungeon Siege* was two years late and US\$4 million overbudget," he confesses before revealing the company's next game will be the 'sequel' to *Total Annihilation* that he never had the opportunity to make. Another highlight is Will Wright's annual



Our Two favourite things - beer and games. Go on mate, crack a smile!



The GDC expo floor was full of high Tech demos and guys wearing company shirts.



Technical director Mark Atkinson (Computer Artworks) Thanks The academy, his hairdresser and stylist at The GDC Choice Awards.

SAN JOSE?

SPECIAL REPORT

10 BEST GDC 2003 MOMENTS

- 1 Peter Molyneux (Lionhead) admitting Black & White was "over-ambitious" - wasn't that the point?
- 2 Chris Taylor (Gas Powered Games) trying to explain to a young lady how he couldn't have been at the party because if he had, he would have hit on her.
- 3 Every speech from *The Sims Online*'s Gordon Walton - "friggin' this, friggin' that" - isn't it supposed to be a family show?
- 4 Warren Spector's (Ion Storm) questioning impression of Carrie from *Sex And The City* - "Is rising cost and risk killing creativity?"
- 5 Jason Rubin (Naughty Dog) and Ted Price (Insomniac) trying to maintain their friendship while trashing each others games in a deathmatch head-to-head.
- 6 Witnessing Square's *Final Fantasy XI* online RPG on PC. At last!
- 7 Epic's latest *Unreal* engine tech demo - like nothing else you've ever seen.
- 8 Journalists on the NVIDIA beer bus trying to blag their way into the ATI party.
- 9 Richard Huddy (ATI, ex-NVIDIA) trying to blag his way into NVIDIA's press launch while wearing a ATI-branded shirt.
- 10 Volition founder Mike Kulas role-playing contract negotiations - hard ass just doesn't do it justice.



Old joke: you wait six months for a graphics card to be released and then NVIDIA's beer bus comes and you don't care anymore.

lecture. Entitled Dynamics For Designers, it's a classic slice of Wright's lateral take on life that all his games exhibit.

Post-lectures the prestigious speakers' party is held, which features one of the highest density of game luminaries per square metre ever. As is usual in these situations, Argonaut's Jez San

entertains the crowd with an array of card tricks. For some reason, he claims they work best on attractive women.

SATURDAY MARCH 8

With some of the less robust members of the UK press core suffering from - ahem - flu, only the committed make it in to hear id's Todd Hollenshead and Relic's Ron Moravsek's talk on how to run a successful game studio - amazingly, million-selling games appear to be the key! Meanwhile, Gas Powered Games continues its domination of GDC with yet another *Dungeon Siege* talk, while Ion Storm's project director Harvey Smith gets square with a talk on, ahem, Orthogonal Unit Design.

Finally, as the show winds down for another year, Peter Molyneux flies in to deliver *The Good, The Bad: A Second Chance*. Ostensibly a preview of *Black & White II*, he admits the original was flawed. The sequel, however, will offer a better interface and in-game control, excellent physics, and more RTS-style options in terms of building huge armies (see page 11). The audience retires happy for another year, while we head straight to the bar for one last drinking session before the unfortunate return to Blighty. Roll on GDC 2004. **[P2]**



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EMULATION ZONE

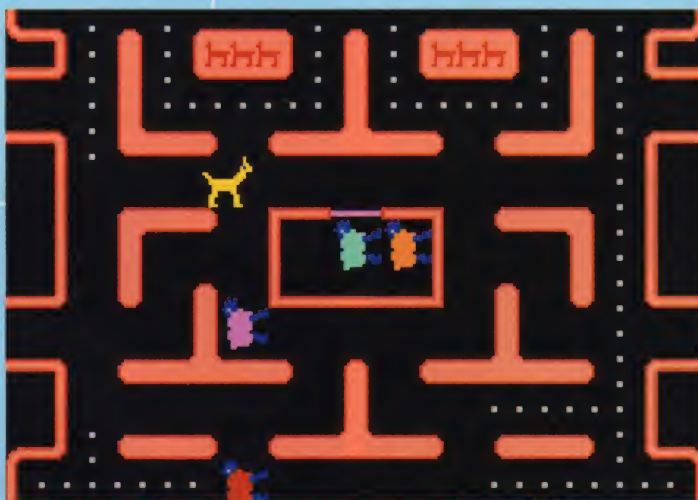
Breaking news from the world of emulation, with retro reanimator **Stuart Campbell**

EMULATION GURU STANDS UP AND SAYS: "NOT IN MY NAME!"

The main man behind the mighty MAME emulator has his own set of ethics and morals when it comes to his program, and won't allow certain morally or technically dubious titles to be included in official builds of the software. The project's originator and co-ordinator, Nicola Salmonia, has recently completed his graduate thesis (which can be downloaded from many emulation sites for the Italian-fluent among you) in which he espouses both a purist and a Puritan approach to certain games which fall within MAME's emulation umbrella, banning them from official builds.

Examples of this include *Pong*, a game which runs in MAME via simulation rather than emulation (since the original coin-op functioned on solid-state technology rather than ROM files), some Neo Geo prototypes, and a slew of arcade gambling games titles (on the

Puritan grounds that, well, gambling's a bit iffy). That this self-censorship doesn't extend to MAME's many X-rated Japanese coin-ops is something we should all be grateful for.



Clearly, hippies also dream of electric sheep.

Anyway, completists should know that these forbidden titles do still have a home in the emulation community, and that home is the self-explanatorily-titled MisFit MAME. MFM is a special build of the emulator which includes only games that aren't found in the official one. Not only do the likes of *Pong* and the gambling games reside there, but also hundreds of homegrown 'hacks' of the

more popular coin-ops. (MisFit MAME has swallowed up the defunct PacMAME, which offered several hundred versions of the various *Pac-Man* games hacked in endlessly inventive and bizarre ways – vector graphics, sprites and sounds from the infamous Atari VCS version, and versions where all the characters look like Elton John.) PC gaming's own Jeff Minter, for example, contributed a remake of *Ms Pac-Man* called *Ms Yak-Man*, with the ghosts replaced by fluffy sheepies and the central character transformed into, obviously, a yak.

And while we're on the subject of the Peruvian-mammal-obsessed one, competitive Emu Zone readers might be interested to know that the Llamasoft forums have for some time been playing host to a very well-organised MAME league, where users can battle away at a different game every week in a continuous series of 10-game seasons. It's a friendly, welcoming site, (assuming

you can put up with the constant animal references and general hippy undercurrents), and if you want to add that little bit of edge to your MAMEing experience, it's well worth a 'trip' (did you see what Emu Zone did there?). Plus, most of them are rubbish, so it won't be as dispiriting as wandering into the average *Counter-Strike* match. Tell them Emu Zone sent you.

LINKS

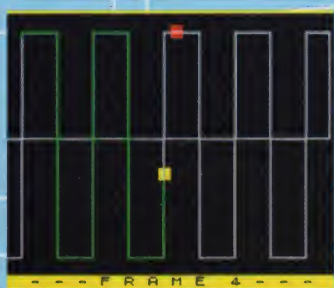
misfitmame.mameworld.net/
MisFit MAME homepage
www.llamasoft.co.uk/forum
Llamasoft forums

WHAT IS EMULATION?

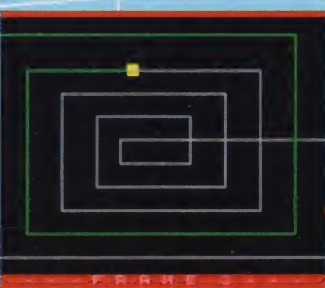


By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form.

The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) which you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can to the emulators themselves.



Yes, people used to pay money for this, but just try stopping playing it.



EMULATION OF THE MONTH

CRUISING ON BROADWAY (ZX SPECTRUM/DAGON 32, 1983)

It's not easy to create an action game with absolutely no graphics, but that's what Jeff Naylor achieved in this 16K ZX Spectrum masterpiece, celebrating its 20th birthday this year. Screens made up of half-a-dozen one-pixel-thick lines, inhabited by characters each made up of a single coloured space, conceal a game which is nevertheless almost unparalleled in the history of gaming addiction. With just a single randomly-moving chaser in near-silent pursuit (the game's sound is another example of the power of well-applied minimalism), you must 'paint' every line in each screen (or 'frame') before

moving on to the next. There are just four levels, (six in the later Dragon 32 version), after which the game loops round with two chasers, then one fast chaser, then two fast ones. But Emu Zone guarantees you now – you'll NEVER get that far. Games so simple that you just can't accept you've been beaten by them are the heart and soul of addiction, and it's hard to imagine how you could possibly create one simpler than *Cruising on Broadway*.

LINKS

freespace.virgin.net/jeff.naylor/computer.htm
Jeff Naylor's own *Cruising* page



Super Derby – anything encouraging gambling is too immoral for MAME!

Vampire Bytes



EXCLUSIVE! ASCARON REVEALS NEW ROLE-PLAYING ACTION ADVENTURE SACRED

DEVELOPER AND PUBLISHER

Ascaron recently paid a flying visit to PC ZONE to unveil a promising new title due for release in the autumn.

Sacred is a fantasy RPG that features six different character types – barbarian, seraphim, elf, dark elf, battle mage and vampiress – each of whom have different

skills and magical abilities, including powerful spells that can set foes on fire or trap them in unholy pentagrams.

"We're trying to offer a huge world to the player with tons of mini-missions to avoid linear gameplay," says product manager Alan Wild. "There's loads of really cool new role-playing stuff, including the

ability to ride and fight on horseback, and having the skill to disarm enemies and pick up their weapons and items."

As well as a smart isometric 3D engine that allows you to zoom in on the ogre-on-ogre action, *Sacred* also has a day and night cycle that is used to fantastic effect with the vampiress – a character who is

a warrior by day, blood-sucking monster by night. We'll have more on this promising little number very soon.

Publisher: Ascaron
Developer: Ascaron
ETA: Autumn
Website: www.ascaron.com



The fighting styles of all the classes in *Sacred* have been motion-captured.



The day and night cycle in the game has a major impact on events.

Good Cop. Bad Cop

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MONTH ON PC ZONE

GOOD COP



Playing *GTA: Vice City* on PC. Yes, it's as good as you wanted it to be.

PC ZONE's nomination for best editorial team in videogames trade magazine *MCV*. Cheers guys.

Our 10th birthday party in London. The hangovers lasted for days.

Dave bringing back a carton of Better'n Eggs pancake/omelette batter from his New York trip. We'll eat like kings!

BAD COP

Dragon's Lair 3D – see why on page 85.

Freelancer Steve O'Hagan's patriotic Welsh rantings. OK, so you might qualify for Euro 2004. Jeez!

Just about the whole PC ZONE team having to move house at the same time.

Oh yes, and the possible threat of nuclear/biological/chemical Armageddon was a bit of a downer this month.

Good Cop: **Charlie Farley** Bad Cop: **Piggy Malone** (from *The Two Ronnies*) – sent in by Matthew Davidson, London. Send in your suggestions for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a PC ZONE goodie-bag!



Full of Eastern Promise

A ROYAL WELCOME PLEASE FOR *SPLINTER CELL* DEVELOPER'S LATEST – *PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME*

UBI SOFT HAS announced that its Montreal development studio, responsible for the superb *Splinter Cell* (and, erm, *Batman: Vengeance*) is working on a new instalment in the classic *Prince of Persia* series, *The Sands of Time*.

For those spritely young gamers out there who may never have experienced the original game, *Prince of Persia* was a 2D platform-jumping and puzzle-solving adventure developed by Yale University geek Jordan Mechner. Released way back in 1989, its revolutionary rotoscoped animation and addictive level design ensured that the title became a veritable gaming phenomenon, selling over three million copies worldwide.

TRUE OR FALSE
The Persians actually built the world's largest ever heated indoor swimming pool.
(answer below)

In 1999, an attempt by developer Red Orb to bring the franchise into 3D failed dismally. But Ubi Soft, along with Mechner, believe the new game will deliver, featuring a storyline that centres on a treacherous advisor who tricks the Prince into releasing the dangerous

Sands of Time from a magical hourglass.

Players will be accompanied through the game by a mysterious, beautiful – and presumably female – companion. The sumptuous environments are set in a mythical Persian kingdom full of flying carpets, hidden treasure and spicy food. We'll have more on

Prince Of Persia: The Sands of Time in a future ZONE.

Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft
ETA: Q4 2003
Website: www.ubi.com



The environments are already looking the business.



Hopefully this will erase memories of the last 3D version.

Answer: FALSE. The Persians built the world's longest road at over 1,500 miles.

A Room with VU

PC ZONE JETS OFF TO BERLIN TO CHECK OUT VU GAMES' NEW PC TITLES

"THIS GAME, WILL for the first time, allow a young girl to know the love of a horse." So began an excited French woman, speaking about *Barbie: Riding Adventure* at the recent VU Games conference in Berlin. It was at this point our PR guide realised he'd brought us to the wrong demonstration and hurriedly ushered us out of the room to see the other forthcoming PC games that the company is keen to showcase.

Kicking things off was the promising first-person shooter *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, currently being developed by Ritual, and tentatively scheduled for release this autumn. Valve's project manager Erik Johnson showed off some of the new weaponry, such as the remote controlled bomb (like a remote controlled car, only this one will blow your ankles off) and the shoulder-mounted LAW rocket. Very cool indeed.

Next up, we played *Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus*, the sequel to *Massive*

Entertainment's highly tactical RTS. Set 300 years after the last game, *GC2* boasts gorgeous, fully 3D landscapes, a host of new units and special orbital weapons for launching attacks from the skies.

"We don't have squads of units any more," says lead game designer Henrik Sebring. "Many times in *GC* you wanted to split up your squad to get more control over them. Now you'll be able to do just that."

As we reported in last month's exclusive First Look, *Ground Control 2* concentrates on the exciting battles, but will retain a small element of resource management. "We have Acquisition Points, which you gain by completing objectives or killing enemies. More points means more reinforcements."

Continuing the theme of 3D RTS sequels, we then moved on to *Homeworld 2*, and the game's producer, Chris Mahnken of Relic, gave us a lengthy demonstration. "Capital ships have large guns and engines which are targetable. So if your fleet is particularly susceptible to ion cannons and

you're going up against a large ship that has them, you can target their ion cannons first." The game was looking absolutely stunning, so fans of the original have a lot to look forward to.

The War Of The Ring is VU Games' new real-time strategy game based on JRR Tolkien's epic novels, but it was one of the less impressive games on show, with unimaginative and derivative gameplay. However, considering developer Liquid Entertainment (responsible for *Battle Realms*) is behind this one, and that it's still early days, it's more than possible we'll see huge improvements over the coming months – especially as a Helm's Deep mission is promised.

Finally, there was a rolling demo of movie tie-in *The Hulk* and playable code of vampire nazi-killing *BloodRayne* (both promising third-person action-adventures), as well as an update on *Judge Dredd Vs Judge Death*. We'll keep you posted on all these over the next few months.



Gregg Barnett, studio manager and creative director, Sick Puppies

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Well, I'd like to say *Unreal II*, but I'm afraid I haven't the time to play anything until *Ghost Master* is finished.

What was the last videogame you finished?

On PC, *Neverwinter Nights*. On GameCube, *Mario Sunshine* (well, almost!).

What is your favourite game of all time?

On personal computers, because of the way it immersed me at the time, I think I'd have to be the original *Ultima* (although if memory serves, *Ultima III* was the one that I actually enjoyed the most). But overall, I'd have to say *Super Mario 64*, as it was a very pure gameplay-driven game in just about every sense of the word.

What are you most proud of in your career?

The nostalgia of the early games like *Way Of The Exploding Fist* make them feel larger than life, and the memories more golden, but as an exercise in originality and game design, I must say that *Ghost Master* is the title I am most proud of.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

Lots of the early pioneers such as Richard Garriott and David Braben, because they were the first to create immersive, imaginary game worlds. And of course Shigeru Miyamoto, whose sense of quality gameplay is superb.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

Well, more often than not, it's the format of choice for game innovators – publishers are also more likely to live on the wild side a little with PC games. Genres tend to form on the PC first, before migrating elsewhere. It's done most for increasing the variety of games out there.

What is your company's philosophy?

Original games for the mass market.

What's the best thing about your job?

Spending my entire life creating games.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Spending my entire life creating games.

What are you working on at the moment?

Ghost Master, which is in that final, all life-consuming phase of development.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

Ah, a trick question – if I knew that, would I really tell the world? I do have a feeling, however, that we may begin to see some cleverly designed free-form or 'sandbox' games, where the goal is more or less to make your own fun. Players always have a habit of surprising game creators, so why not use that to all our advantages!

VU GAMES RELEASE DATES



BloodRayne

May 2003



Counter-Strike: Condition Zero

Q2 2003



The Hulk

Q2 2003



Homeworld 2

Q3 2003



Judge Dredd Vs Judge Death

Q4 2003



Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus

Q4 2003



The War Of The Ring

Q1 2004

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

ChartTrack

TOP 10

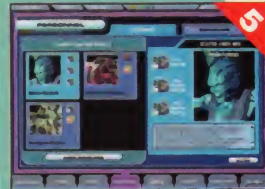


Straight in at number one is the excellent RTS *Command & Conquer: Generals*. Although it's light on gameplay innovations, *Generals* is still fantastic fun, addictive and possesses gorgeous eye candy – providing your PC's up to it.



Splinter Cell sneaks into the number two position after a slight release delay. Our February issue exclusive is an unmissable combination of intense stealthy action, cool gadgets, superb mission variety and great looks. An almost flawless classic.

| | TITLE | PUBLISHER | SCORE |
|--------|--|-------------|-------|
| 1 NEW | COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS | EA | 86% |
| 2 NEW | SPLINTER CELL | UBI SOFT | 94% |
| 3 ▼ | THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION | EA | N/A |
| 4 ▼ | THE SIMS: UNLEASHED | EA | 78% |
| 5 NEW | MASTER OF ORION III | INFOGRAMES | 59% |
| 6 NEW | PRAETORIANS | EIDOS | 80% |
| 7 ▼ | SIM CITY 4 | EA | 80% |
| 8 NEW | ULTIMA ONLINE: AGE OF SHADOWS | EA | N/A |
| 9 NEW | IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE | CODEMASTERS | 77% |
| 10 NEW | UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING | INFOGRAMES | 94% |



Hardcore space empire builder *Master Of Orion III* debuts at number five, despite a lukewarm review in this issue (page 82). With both real-time and turn-based elements, *MOOIII* is let down by bad visuals and poor AI micro-management.



A disappointing show for *Unreal II: The Awakening* at number ten, after mixed reviews ranging from ecstatic to downright vindictive. A simplistic FPS it may be, but there's tons of variety, weapons and the most amazing graphics seen in a PC title so far.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

It's taken over three years for the chart to look this respectable. Most of these games are either Recommended or Classics, which is good because we now know the public are buying the right games.

VoodooGod

I see a rather large tactical influence on the charts this month what with C&C and The Sims etc. Is this a good thing? I'm not sure. Anyway, run for cover, build a base and blow up your local gaming emporium.

ruined

Good to see *Praetorians* sitting pretty at number six after a lot of online reviews slated it. It's a nice change to have a RTS game where there's no resource collecting, researching and technologies.

optimus9999

Virgin megastores

TOP 10

| | | |
|----|--|-------------|
| 1 | SPLINTER CELL | UBI SOFT |
| 2 | COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS | EA |
| 3 | PRAETORIANS | EIDOS |
| 4 | UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING | INFOGRAMES |
| 5 | SIM CITY 4 | EA |
| 6 | THE SIMS: UNLEASHED | EA |
| 7 | AGE OF MYTHOLOGY | EA |
| 8 | MEDAL OF HONOR: AA - SPEARHEAD | EA |
| 9 | FIFA 2003 | EA |
| 10 | THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TFOTR | BLACK LABEL |

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following:

QUESTION: What is the name of the author whose books inspired the PC games *Splinter Cell* and *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*?

Answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo (CPCZ05A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: May 1, 2003

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

APRIL

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| AIRPORT TYCOON | TAKE 2 |
| BLITZKRIEG | CDV |
| CASINO, INC | KONAMI |
| DEVASTATION | NOVALOGIC |
| ECHELON: WIND WARRIORS | OXYGEN |
| FREELANCER | MICROSOFT |
| HUGO - BLACK DIAMOND FEVER | ITE MEDIA |
| MIDNIGHT CLUB II | ROCKSTAR |
| STRIKE FIGHTERS: PROJECT 1 | JUST FLIGHT |
| THE GREAT ESCAPE | SCI |
| TROPICO 2: PIRATE COVE | TAKE 2 |
| VIETCONG | TAKE 2 |

MAY

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| BLOODRAYNE | VU GAMES |
| CHASER | JOWOOD |
| DRAGON'S LAIR 3D | UBI SOFT |
| ENTER THE MATRIX | INFOGRAMES |
| F1 CHALLENGE '99 - '02 | EA |
| GHOST MASTER | EMPIRE |
| HARBINGER | DREAMCATCHER |
| LOTUS CHALLENGE | XICAT |
| MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR - VIKING INVASION | ACTIVISION |
| MOTO GP 2 | THQ |
| NEXT GENERATION TENNIS 2003 | WANADOO |
| PRO BEACH SOCCER | WANADOO |
| RED FACTION II | THQ |
| REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION | EIDOS |
| RISE OF NATIONS | MICROSOFT |
| STALKER: OBLIVION LOST | CDV |
| THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR | EA |
| WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2003 | CODEMASTERS |
| WORLD WAR II: FRONTLINE COMMAND | KOCH MEDIA |
| X-MEN: WOLVERINE'S REVENGE | ACTIVISION |

JUNE

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| CYCLING MANAGER 3 | GMX MEDIA |
| ISS 3 | KONAMI |
| LOTUS CHALLENGE | XICAT |
| MEDAL OF HONOR: AA - NEW EXPANSION | EA |
| STARSKY & HUTCH | EMPIRE |
| STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II | ACTIVISION |
| THE HULK | VU GAMES |
| WORLD RACING | TDK |

JULY

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS | DIGITAL WORKSHOP |
| CHARM OF WAR | OXYGEN |
| FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004 | MICROSOFT |
| INDYCAR SERIES | CODEMASTERS |
| WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE | VU GAMES |

AUGUST

| | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3 | CODEMASTERS |
| HALO | MICROSOFT |
| TRON 2.0 | DISNEY |

SEPTEMBER

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| APOCALYPTICA | KONAMI |
| CONFLICT: DESERT SABRE | SCI |
| CRUSADERS - BATTLE FOR OUTREMER | WANADOO |
| FIRE WARRIOR | THQ |
| PSYCHOTOXIC | CDV |
| SOLDNER: SECRET WARS | JOWOOD |
| THE SIMS ONLINE | EA |
| VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG | EMPIRE |
| WILL ROCK | UBI SOFT |

OCTOBER

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON | THQ |
| SACRED | ASCARON |

TBA

| | |
|----------------------------|------------|
| DUKE NUKEM FOREVER | ROCKSTAR |
| ENCLAVE | STARBREEZE |
| EARTH AND BEYOND | EA |
| HALF-LIFE 2 | VU GAMES |
| MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER | EA |
| MAX PAYNE 2 | ROCKSTAR |
| QUAKE IV | ACTIVISION |

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

TRON 2.0

MONOLITH'S PROMISING first-person shooter has been unfortunately delayed until late summer, but it seems with very good reason - Tron 2.0 will now feature online multiplayer Light Cycle races! Strap in for a full on preview next issue.

- Publisher: Disney
- Developer: Monolith
- ETA: Summer
- Website: www.tron20.net



ENCLAVE



WE'VE ALREADY run the demo of this impressive third-person medieval hack 'n' slash, but the demise of publisher Swing! has meant an indefinite release date delay. But with an engine as impressive as this one, it shouldn't be long before it's picked up again.

- Publisher: TBC
- Developer: Starbreeze
- ETA: TBC
- Website: www.o3games.com

CRUSADERS: BATTLE FOR OUTREMER

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES developer Black Cactus has delayed the launch of this Infidel vs Heathen RTS cracker until September. Next-gen visuals and excellent AI make this one to look out for.

- Publisher: Wanadoo
- Developer: Black Cactus
- ETA: September
- Website: www.blackcactus.com



US TOP 10

| | | |
|----|------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS | EA |
| 2 | SIM CITY 4 | EA |
| 3 | SPLINTER CELL | UBI SOFT |
| 4 | BATTLEFIELD 1942: THE ROAD TO ROME | EA |
| 5 | THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION | EA |
| 6 | THE SIMS: UNLEASHED | EA |
| 7 | UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING | INFOGRAMES |
| 8 | ZOO TYCOON | MICROSOFT |
| 9 | BATTLEFIELD 1942 | EA |
| 10 | MEDAL OF HONOR: AA - SPEARHEAD | EA |

5/11/2004

THE ULTIMATE BROADBAND GAME



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THE BEST • ~OF~ BRITISH

In the second part of our grand tour of British games developers, **Martin Korda** and **Rhianna Pratchett** pootle off in separate directions to check out...

WEST SUSSEX AND KENT



THE DEVELOPERS

THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

Currently working on - *Medieval: Total War: The Viking Invasion*, *Rome: Total War*

SPLASH DAMAGE

Currently working on - *Return To Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*

FIVE THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT... WEST SUSSEX AND KENT

- Kent is the garden of England, which means it must be covered in cat shit.
- Unbelievably, someone's set up a website dedicated to Kent and Sussex buses, www.southbus.co.uk. We've been on one, and they're really not that impressive.
- Kent sounds a little bit like... [stop right there Korda - Ed]
- David Bowie played his first gig in the Rat and Parrot pub in Beckenham, Kent, which is directly opposite Pocket Studios' offices.
- According to one Kent-based developer, car thieves in the county are a generous bunch. He once had his car stolen, then returned three days later with more petrol than when he'd had it stolen. Ahh, how nice.

DAY ONE, leg two, of the PC ZONE grand tour of Britain. With Guildford done, and Rhianna off to Kent, it was time for me to take what should have been a 45 minute journey across country (almost literally), to West Sussex, to check out the cream of south-eastern games development. Our destination? The home of the world's leading RTS developer, The Creative Assembly, who just a few short years ago was churning out sports games for EA, before founder Tim Ansell decided to make a brave foray into the strategy market with *Shogun: Total War*. The rest, as they say (whoever they are), is history.

TOO BLOODY EARLY

Being stuck behind a manure truck at 9am isn't the most pleasant way of waking up, the stench more pungent than a keg of smelling salts in a homeless refuge. But that's precisely where I, and

my guide for the day, PR guru Cathy Campos found ourselves as we trundled towards The Creative Assembly's offices, slower than a bead of snot running down a sleeve. An hour later we pulled into a car park and spilled from our vehicle, gasping for air and lungs burning, only to be met by a plume of cigarette smoke wafting from a group of dishevelled men standing in a shivering group by a doorway.

Clearly we were at the right place.

Warm handshakes and beckoning gestures preceded a spacious conference room, mugs of steaming coffee and a half-hour presentation by Mike Simpson, development director of *The Viking Invasion*, an impressive-looking expansion pack to the world's greatest-ever RTS, *Medieval: Total War*. Keen to get started, I asked Mike about what

Vikings will offer. "We've focussed solely on the British Isles and have gone to a much higher level of detail. The game starts around 793, before the Vikings started their raids, and ends around 1065. There are eight factions in all - including the Vikings - vying for control of the British Isles and its 43 provinces." The conversation continued during

an obligatory custom battle demonstration, which clearly showed an emphasis towards foot troops and missile firing units, such as the Irish spearmen, who threw their pointed sticks at enemy ranks.

Four cups of coffee, three trips to the toilet and two battles later, the demonstration came to an end. It was time to eat, and talk about CA.

FOOD AND FAST CARS

At the designated pub we were to meet Tim Ansell and creative director Michael



Tim Ansell



Mike Simpson



Rome: Total War is looking absolutely stunning.

de Plater, the man who ZONE once famously (eg his workmates never let him live it down) described in a *Medieval* preview as having "a magnificent plumage of hair sprouting from his chin". Just as we sat down, the pub door creaked open, and in walked a man taller than a tree (not a fully grown one though), shaved to within an inch of his life and sporting a pate a Buddhist monk would have been proud of. Unbelievably, this was the very same Michael de Plater. Thankfully, he didn't kill me where I stood, but instead warmly shook our hands as he took his seat alongside Tim.



Michael de Plater

developers attempting to rip-off the *Total War* series? To Mike, the answer is simple. "It's a big hill to climb. It takes at least two years to make the jump we've made." With such a daunting time-span, it's little wonder few developers are willing to risk emulating the success that CA has had, and continues to enjoy. Not to mention a future that looks all the more exciting with the unveiling of the unbelievably good-looking *Rome: Total War*, which as Michael revealed, has been in production since work began on its predecessor, *Medieval*, and will hopefully be finished by the end of this year. Bring it on.

B-MOVIE MADNESS

Would you believe us if I told you that originally, *Shogun: Total War* was going to be a 2D, C&C-inspired, B-title RTS? No? Well believe it. As Tim explained between sips of ale: "After C&C came out, a whole load of clones appeared which sold quite well. Our first thought was to do a B-title C&C clone. However, as development progressed we started to see more and more potential in it. The original idea was to have lots of very small men fighting each other in 2D, rather than a few blocky units, which everyone else was doing. And then I said, 'Why don't we do it in 3D?' Everyone thought it would be impossible. But when we worked out all the maps and methods, we found it could actually work." And work it did, as the massive worldwide sales of *Shogun*, *Mongol Invasion* and *Medieval* have proved - the first two having sold well over 200,000 copies worldwide.

So how is it that after such enormous success, we haven't seen other

MAGIC FORMULA

I asked the lads what the secret was behind making an RTS which isn't just groundbreaking, but entertaining to the masses? After all, it's a union which few developers have managed to achieve with



And to think the *Total War* series was originally meant to be a B-title RTS.

JOB FOCUS - THE SOUND GUY

BIT OF A MUSICAL WIZZKID ARE WE? FANCY THE SOUND OF WRITING MUSIC FOR GAMES? WELL, HERE'S SOME ADVICE FROM ONE OF THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS

We chat to...

Jeff Van Dyck
audio director at
Creative Assembly
and BAFTA and
EMMA award
winner



PCZ Tell us a bit about your role.

JEFF I am the audio director, responsible for the overall audio design, music, sound effects, dialogue and environmental sounds.

PCZ How do you go about composing music for a game?

JEFF I talk to the designer to find out their overall vision of the game. From this I try to get into the same frame of mind as them and then listen to CDs, films and other games with a similar style of music, then start bashing at the midi keyboard until I record something that has the right feel. If I've captured the right vibe, I'll orchestrate it. At this point I'll play it to the team and if they get into it, I do the final mix.

PCZ What advice would you give to someone wanting to follow in your footsteps?

JEFF The most important thing is to make sure you have a great sounding demo. If you know how to make something sound good, be it an explosion, or a song, your work will speak for itself. At that point it's a matter of letting people hear what you can do, like having your work as clips that can be heard online. That said, I got my first job by answering an ad in the paper.



What have the Romans ever given us? Rome: Total War, that's what.



Burn and pillage as the Vikings.



Conquer the British Isles in Viking Invasion.



The anti-war protest soon turned nasty.

JOB FOCUS - THE CREATIVE GUY

THINK YOU KNOW WHAT MAKES A GOOD GAME?
YOU KNOW NOTHING! BUT HERE'S A MAN THAT DOES

We chat to...
Richard Jolly
creative director at
Splash Damage



see people play our game. Splash
Damage milestone parties are a
close second!

PCZ What does
your job involve?

RICHARD I work with our artists, level
designers and programmers to oversee
and direct the way *Enemy Territory*
is presented to the player. Ultimately,
I'm responsible for the aesthetic look
of the whole thing.

PCZ How did you get the job?

RICHARD Like many of the founding
staff at Splash Damage, I came from the
Quake III Fortress (QIIF) mod team.

PCZ What are the best and worst things
about your job?

RICHARD The worst thing is probably
working 36 hours straight for a
milestone, while the best is getting to

PCZ What advice would you give to
readers who are interested into getting
into the industry?

RICHARD Probably the biggest of the
two feet I got in the door was through
the mod-making community. There are
plenty of games out there with mod-
making tools and all of them come with
tutorials to help you get started. It's a
free and easy way to get your way into
the industry. It's not uncommon for
community members to be hired by
developers in that field.

PCZ What are your personal ambitions
within the industry?

RICHARD I'd like to find more time to
focus on game design, while continuing
to build Splash Damage as one of
Europe's best FPS developers.

any retail success. "The key to making a
great RTS is to make it deep without
making it complicated," began Mike in a
serious tone. "You have to find new ways
of doing things. Too many developers
spend too long looking at other games
and thinking they can use certain features
from them. We try to look at how we can
improve what we're doing, without paying
too much attention to other games." To
ignore the opposition could be seen as
arrogant, but when you've shown the
balls to try something totally innovative,
and succeeded like CA has, then it's hard
to argue with Mike's line of thought.

As meals disappeared from plates
and a chorus of burps rang out, Mike
spoke of CA's keenness to expand, a
process he's set in motion by opening
a development studio in Australia which
will be working on even more *Total War*
related games.

Handshakes and thanks rounded off
the afternoon as we emerged blinking and
bloated into the mid-afternoon sun to go
our separate ways. Creative Assembly is
clearly a company going places, leading
the way forward in the evolution of the
RTS. For now though, the only place we
were all going, was home...

SPLASH DAMAGE

Beckenham, Kent. Not rural enough to be
called 'sleepy', yet far enough from
London to escape the rat-race.
Beckenham. Where you can buy a
turquoise leotard, a trip to Bognor and a
meringue pig, but try buying a dictaphone
and shop assistants start reaching for
the alarm, with that "Doreen, get the big
axe, we've got a live one here", look.
Beckenham, the home of Splash Damage,
the team responsible for the multiplayer
element of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*.

DREAM WORKS

For those of you out there who think that running your own games studio, or even working in one, is an impossible dream, take comfort in the story of Splash Damage. Things kick off back in 2000 and a certain mod called *Quake III Fortress*. "A group of us were really into *Team Fortress* and the whole clan scene," explains the CEO and founder of Splash Damage, Paul Wedgwood. "When the source code for *Quake* was released a small group of people started saying they wanted to make a mod for *QIII* that captured the spirit of *Team Fortress*. And that's where the idea for the *QIII* mod came from."

It was to be from that team of *Quake III* mod makers that the core team of Splash Damage would emerge. "All of us were serious about mod making, but we were also interested in breaking into games development as a profession," recalls Paul. "So we started to think quite seriously about the idea of starting a games company. I was originally the technical services manager at Barry's World, which went bust in 2001, and I started Splash Damage (named after the blast radius of a *Quake* rocket) in June of that year."

Initially SD worked with a TV broadcasting company, providing technology and games footage, but their real break came at the beginning of 2002 when Kevin Cloud of id Software introduced them to Activision and Jonathan Moses who was later to become their producer. "We were really big fans of their games, and as mod-makers using their engine we got their attention," explains Paul. "I think both id and ourselves realised around the same time that we had the potential to go commercial. Since then, Kevin Cloud at id has been both our executive producer and mentor – and we're very, very lucky to have him."

MOD TO WISE


What sets Splash Damage apart from many developers is that the entire 17 strong team (15 of which are based in the Beckenham studio) are recruited entirely from various Internet modding communities, with many members coming directly from the *QIII* team. It's a fact that Paul is extremely proud of. "There's not a single veteran games developer in our company. Everyone we've hired has run community sites, written tutorials, worked on mods or was doing something else for the gaming community already."

Splash Damage is indeed a bunch of fresh-faced, cosmopolitan individuals, with team members drawn from all over the world including Canada, Spain, Norway and the deepest, darkest depths of Northern England. This is a deliberate move, says Paul, to avoid getting overloaded with developers from just one part of the industry. "We felt that if we just went out and hired a lot of local industry people then we wouldn't be doing anything different from other UK

developers. But if we went onto the Net, which is worldwide, and got up-and-coming mod makers, we knew we were going to get raw talent and enthusiasm, as well as people who hadn't been burnt out by the games industry before they even start working for us."

FREE TO A GOOD HOME

Not long after I visited Splash Damage, Activision announced that after problems with the single-player element of the game, it would only be releasing the multiplayer side of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* as a free download, rather than a full game. "We're still doing what we were doing before – that is, making the best multiplayer FPS we can imagine,"

explains Paul. "The only difference for us is that *Enemy Territory* will be free like *Counter-Strike* and *Army Ops*. Which means even more people will end up playing our game." In many ways, it seems almost fitting for Splash Damage, whose very heart and soul has come from the modding community and a genuine passion for gaming, that its first commercial effort should be available to download for nowt. 



Paul Wedgwood



Enemy Territory is going to be a free download.



The command map displays mission objectives and enemy intelligence.

POCKET STUDIOS

WE CHAT TO PRODUCER LES ELLIS...

Currently working on a couple of big movie licenses and groundwork for next-gen and PC projects



Just a stone's throw up the road from Splash Damage is Pocket Studios, a handheld and next-gen console studio and home to ex-ZONE freelancer-turned producer, Les Ellis. Pocket started three years ago with *Alone In The Dark* on the GBC and *Lego Racers* on the GBA. It's also done *Fellowship Of The Ring* (book version) and *Gauntlet* (US only) and is currently working on an *Incredible Hulk* game for the GBA. But Pocket's eyes are on more than just handhelds, as it has several undisclosed next-generation console and PC projects in the works

"No developer wants to put all its eggs in one format basket, so it makes sense to take some of our ideas to the next level," says Les about the move to stake a claim in the PC market. "We have so many ideas and it's going to take the power of the PC to fully realise them."

But how has the move from the cesspit of games journalism to the darkened rooms of games development been for a 12-year industry veteran like Ellis, known as the Gothic Schmeichel for his goalkeeping prowess and love of the colour black?

"It can be frustrating as a journo knowing what's wrong with a game while not being able to change it," says Les. "Now it's my job to make them as good as possible, within tight deadlines. It's been a relatively easy transition as I've had a good team around me, and seeing your ideas come to life in a game is so much better than just getting a mag back at the end of a month."

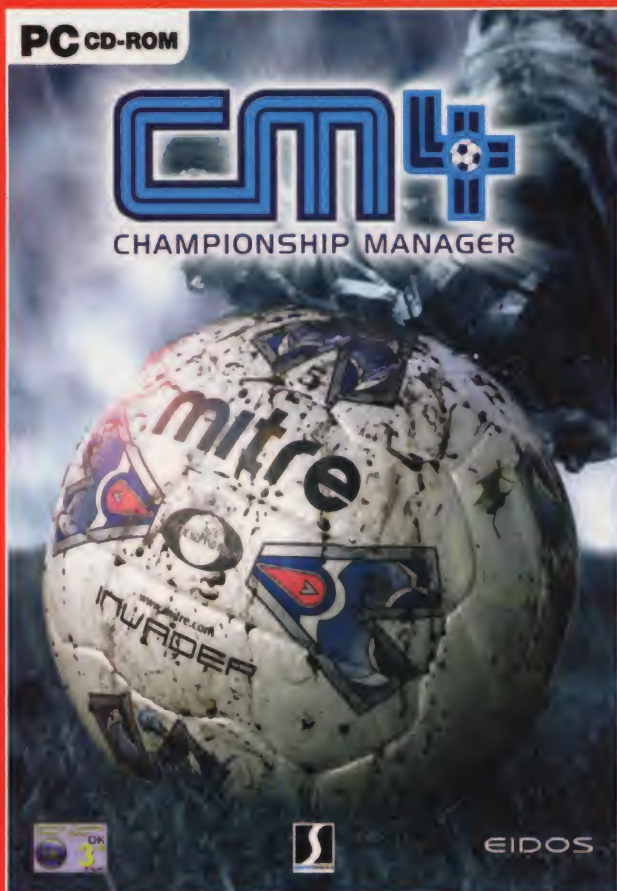


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WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON



Other games? Fuggeddaboutem...

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

One of the best games in the world is back: bigger, brasher and with balls the size of watermelons. *Dave Woods* is humbled in its presence





THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Rockstar North

PUBLISHER Rockstar Games

WEBSITE www.rockstargames.com/vicecity

ETA May 16

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the 'sequel' to one of the best games of all time
- Revamped DX9 engine
- New weapons and vehicles
- Double the playing area of *GTA III*
- You can buy property
- Ace '80s soundtrack



CV



ROCKSTAR GAMES

Founded in 1998, Rockstar Games is the publisher of the *Grand Theft Auto* series, developed by Scottish powerhouse Rockstar North (formerly DMA Design). By giving away the first *GTA* game online, they've cemented our love for them.

1999 The world wanted *Grand Theft Auto 2* to be the first game in the series to go 3D, but the developer wasn't ready. The gameplay was there, but we wanted more dammit!

2001 Slick, stylish and a blast to play *Max Payne* might have centred around the gimmick of Bullet Time, but what a gimmick it was to hang your coat on.

2002 *Grand Theft Auto III* marked the day the *GTA* series went 3D, and not even Rockstar North could have hoped that it was going to play this well. Quite simply, one of the best games ever.



THE LIGHTS

dim and Mr. Mister's *Broken Wings* thumps into action as a man in a sharp suit plunges his flared nostrils into a pile of coke so big it would have cost Daniella Westbrook more than her septum. Cut to a couple of bouffanted blondes in pink skirts on roller skates, and back to Nice Guy Eddie explaining that he doesn't know who's dead, who's alive,

who's caught and who's not. The action switches to more drugs, violent shootings, more roller skates and a few more lines of the finest Peruvian.

If you asked most developers to name the inspiration behind their latest game, they'd go slightly red, look down at their feet and mutter something about a teacher back in school who gave them shelter in the computer



You can keep all your costumes and change whenever you get the urge.



Waterways play a bigger part in Vice City.

labs from the bullies who made their lunchtimes hell. But this is different. This is Rockstar and I'm in their New York headquarters to check out how the latest game in the *Grand Theft Auto* series, *Vice City*, is coming along. Sometimes, life is sweet.

(I JUST) DIED IN YOUR ARMS

As is becoming the norm, *Vice City* has been out on PlayStation 2 since Christmas, but if you've got any sense you've kept yourself well away from it. I had to force myself into a quick three-hour razz around just so that I didn't come across as a clueless tallywhacker in New York, but even that was enough to convince me there's only one version of the game worth playing. *Vice City* might be identical in content between the two platforms, but visually they couldn't be further apart. The best analogy is pirate films. You can't wait for *Star Wars III* to hit the cinemas over here, so you buy a grainy DVD copy filmed from a digital camera perched in some obese American's bulging crotch. And in

doing so effectively ruin the experience you could've had if you'd been patient.

You might not think visuals are that important, but the revamped DX9 engine adds to the experience immeasurably. This is something I discovered as soon as the game was fired up on a huge presentation screen by Devin Winterbottom, *Vice City*'s product manager, leaving me struggling to maintain my cool in the face of one of the most stunning games I've ever seen. The official line on why the game gets released on PC after PS2 is that the developers have to go back in and buff the city up until it's gleaming (though we suspect the truth might have something to do with a company called Sony, and the word 'exclusive').

Either way, Devin looks as proud as any father clutching his newborn as he runs us through the visuals: "Oh yeah. The new engine is a definite evolution over *GTA III*. It's all DX 9 stuff, and we've gone back in and re-done all the textures," he says.

"GTA III was like the dirtiest, worst place on earth – Vice City is a sun-kissed vacation spot"

DEVIN WINTERBOTTOM
PRODUCT MANAGER, VICE CITY

GTA FREE

CAN'T WAIT FOR VICE CITY? DOWNLOAD THE GAME THAT STARTED IT ALL OF FOR FREE

Just before we went to press Rockstar announced it was going to give the original *GTA* away for free on its website. In an age where most publishers refuse to release any code onto the Internet, even games that were coded for defunct home computers like the Spectrum (usually justified with the old bullshit corporate line of 'these games and characters are our intellectual properties and we might decide to revisit them

down the line'), the decision by Rockstar is a breath of oxygenated air. Symptomatic of the cool that Rockstar exudes, other publishers might, just might, decide to stop condemning games into historical obscurity and let us appreciate the gems from our past.

Funnily enough, revisiting the original shows how the new 3D games are pretty faithful reproductions of the original 2D isometric games. The freeform gameplay is pretty much the same, and if you haven't played the original it's well worth the meaty 300Mb+ download. And even though it's a lot of fun, it's obvious that giving away the

original *GTA* isn't going to detract sales from *Vice City*. If anything it's going to turn on new fans and help Rockstar sell even more games. As if any help was needed.



It might be 2D but the game's the same.

Switching from day to night, the game suddenly explodes in a mass of neon shop fronts and street lamps. Pedestrians ditch their swimmers for suits and smart party clobber. Standing in the middle of the road, an oncoming motorbike blinds me with its headlights. Dazzlingly bright at the core, the light diffuses round the edges creating an amazingly lifelike effect – the first of hundreds of subtle effects I was going to get unnaturally excited about as I played through the game on the enormous screen they had rigged up.

KIDS IN AMERICA

The next thing that grabbed me by the balls was the draw distance. Unlike the PS2 version, *Vice City* on the PC stretches almost to the horizon. If you can't see something clearly, it's more likely that it's your eyes that are defective. And to make the most out of all this, you can use your mouse to look around and take in every little nuance. Something Devin points to in

highlighting differences between playing the game on either platform: "When you're a console gamer you're always looking at what's ahead of you. You never take the time to look around you, look behind you."

Which means you won't get to see some of the pedestrian antics the team has been lovingly slaving over. Antics made all the more amusing and convincing by Rockstar's decision to motion capture the movements of professional stage actors. "All the pedestrians have their own mannerisms, and things they do and say. And, where *Grand Theft Auto III* is like the dirtiest, worst place on earth, *Vice City* is like a sun-kissed vacation spot. The pedestrians reflect that, walking around in bathing suits, or roller skating in tight pink spandex and headbands." Right on cue, a skater who wouldn't have looked out of place in the WWE in the mid '80s tries to skate round us only to fall on his pert, pink arse. As he gingerly gets to his feet, the room dissolves in hysterical

laughter, much as it would if we'd seen his slapstick fall in the real world. "It's great demoing the game, because the same thing never happens twice."

AND THE BEAT GOES ON

But the improvements in *Vice City* aren't just cosmetic. Rockstar might not be giving *Vice City* full sequel status, but there's enough new to make it a huge evolution from the last game. First off, where Liberty City might as well have been a cardboard film set, giving the appearance of a city without anywhere for you to go except the streets, *Vice City* lets you move around inside buildings, and even buy your own properties when you get enough cash. You can't go in any building you want (we presume they're saving this for the online version of the game, when, or indeed, if, it comes to fruition – see the Gangbang boxout below for more info) but the various hotels, discos and shopping malls help extend the illusion of the city, and provide some pretty funky backdrops for the shady deals and gunfights you get into through the course of the game.

And this is no lazy add-on. The two entities co-exist, which means that although there's a short loading time when you move from outside to indoors, everything carries on in the city as if you were still out there. So any pedestrians hanging around outside will still be there doing their thang when you come back out. And any cops on your tail might not give up the chase just because you've ducked inside a building – a quick peek out of the window should tell you if this is the case.

GANGBANG

FORGET EVERQUEST AND STAR WARS: GALAXIES, THE ONLY ONLINE GAME WORTH SAVING YOUR MONEY FOR IS *GRAND THEFT AUTO*. BUT IS IT EVER GOING TO HAPPEN?

The concept is awesome. Take the living, breathing city of *Grand Theft Auto* and inhabit it with living, breathing people. A persistent online environment could take the properties/interiors from *Vice City* and make them the base for your online gang. I put the question to Jeff Castaneda, PR director for Rockstar Games and didn't really expect an answer, although I didn't exactly get a flat denial. "If or when we do the whole online thing we want it to be something special. When we went from *GTA2* to *GTA III* it was such a huge leap that we want to make the same sort of jump when it happens. We'll have to wait and see, I guess."

In preparation I'm already drafting up the names for the inner circle of the PC Zone gang. I'd sit in the inner sanctum, surrounded by my family (the Zone team) and funded by thousands of Zone readers in the streets. Of course, it wouldn't be long before I was ousted by a feckless upstart, thrown into the streets and forced to earn my corn by driving and fetching packages for the lowest of the low. Life's a bitch and then you die.



You wanna be in my gang, my gang, my gang?



Yes, you can shoot while you're riding the motorbikes.



No bricks, no browns, but lots of pink.



He's not much of a looker, but I wouldn't tell him that to his face.



Any man who owns his own helicopter can count himself a success.

AUTOMATIC

The next tick on the checklist is the addition of new vehicles, most notably helicopters and motorbikes. There are six flyable helicopters in the game (plus a radio-controlled model), and although they take a bit of getting used to, they're nowhere near as hard to fly as the Dodo from GTA

"Right from the off you get the feeling that Rockstar has been watching all the right films"

III. You can land on secluded rooftops for an afternoon's sniping, or use your blades to chop up a group of pensioners enjoying a round of golf. You'll also see choppers if your wanted rating gets too high, though these will be the ones the SWAT teams sent to bring you in are abselling down from – if you're quick enough, a burst from your uzi or sniper shot to the pilot can take them down.

But the addition of motorbikes is an even more significant change to the game plays. Ranging from the ultra-trendy, but ultimately ultra-slow Faggio scooter, up to the classic Harley-types, the first thing you notice is how well they handle. You can pull wheelies (and fall off the back if you get a bit carried away,

as I did), and do some serious damage to yourself if you crash, with your body flying through the air and coming down in a crunch of bone and tarmac. But the coolest thing is that you can also shoot while you're riding, a feature that alters the skew of the previous game, enabling you to shoot left, right, or directly ahead.

Other changes include the ability to shoot out tyres, causing vehicles to slew, or shoot through windscreens to take out the driver. Play it right and you can take the head off a driver with a well-aimed shot (yep, it's more violent than GTA III) and then watch in glee as the car crashes and the decapitated torso flops out. Sick? Sue me. Of course, all of this means that you're not as safe as you

making money. The only problem is that within seconds of the game kicking off you're involved in a drug deal that goes very sour. You lose the drugs, you lose the money, and your boss, Sonny Forelli, is not a happy chappy as you find out in one of the first cinematic cut-scenes.

Tommy: "We were set up. The deal was an ambush."

Sonny: "You'd better be kidding me. Tell me you've still got the money."

Tommy: "No Sonny, I don't have the money."

Sonny (turning a bit psychotic): "That was my money Tommy. Mine! Mine! You'd better not be screwing me Tommy, because you know I don't like to be screwed with."

Tommy: "Hey Sonny. You've got my

used to be in a vehicle, as Devin was quick to point out. "In GTA III, when you in a car you felt pretty invincible, but now cops can shoot your tyres out or turn on tyre spikes, so things are a bit tougher."

RUNNING WITH THE NIGHT

In a less specific sense, Vice City seems to have more of an adult feel to it – not that there's more unnecessary language or content. I might only have had five or so hours to get acquainted with the game, but right from the off you get the feeling Rockstar has been watching all the right films. In jail since Liberty City went tits up, you've been sent up to Vice City by the The Forelli brothers to scout out the new turf and see if you can start

personal assurance I'm going to get you your money back. And the drugs. And I'll mail you the dicks of those responsible."

Sonny: "Hey, I already know that. If it was anybody else you'd be dead already. But because it's you, I'm going to let you handle this."

A fairly typical exchange, but it took a while to click that this is the first time in a GTA game that

If you drive everywhere you'll end up looking like the lady on the sidewalk.

VIDEOGAMES SAVED THE RADIO STARS

THE RADIO IS BACK AND BIGGER THAN BEFORE. WE GET THE LOWDOWN ON THE '80S TUNES THAT ARE GOING TO ROCK YOUR WORLD

If you played GTA III then you'll probably have spent time cruising the streets listening to the sounds. Vice City takes the concept even further, with a spin-off seven-CD soundtrack that you can purchase separately containing more than 100 tracks from the '80s including Squeeze, Roxy Music, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, A Flock Of Seagulls, The Human League and Michael Jackson – all of which appear in the game scattered across the various radio stations you can pick up.

If that doesn't float your boat there are some fantastic old-skool flavours from Mantronix, Kurtis Blow and Grandmaster Flash. Or, if you take after our very own Martin Korda, you'll be tuning into V-Rock for a bit of Twisted Sister, Slayer and Megadeth. There's something for everyone, but if you're the sort of miserable sod who only gets off on math rock you can download your own sordid MP3s into the game and rock to your own beat.



you've heard your character (Tommy Vercetti, voiced by Ray Liotta) actually speak. One of the few criticisms we had about the last game was that your character was a bit of a dick, just moving from boss to boss, taking orders without displaying any personality. That's all changed now, and you start the game as a playa – someone who commands respect and is well known throughout the criminal fraternity, all of whom you're introduced to early on, *Goodfellas*-style.

AND THE BEAT GOES ON

As for the way the game plays, it's *Grand Theft Auto III*, but buffed, polished and improved. The freeform nature and mission structure is the same, but using feedback from people like you, Rockstar has opted for bigger missions where you feel like you're doing more than just taking something from A to B.

"The feedback we got from people about mission structure was that they liked the multi-tiered missions in *GTA III*, such as the Bomb The Base level," says Devin. "We wanted to do more of this in *Vice City*, so the missions are longer and more involving." To illustrate, he launches into a mission which starts off with you on a roof, protecting a drug

deal. When it inevitably goes wrong you have to jump on a bike and chase the gunman, firing and riding as you go.

And what about bugs? The room falls silent for a moment, so I explain that *Grand Theft Auto III* suffered from the PC nightmare of having about 675,000 different combinations of hardware. We didn't actually have any problems with the game, but going on the forums around the time of release a lot of you did. Devin replies candidly: "We learnt from *GTA III*. We're going to spend more time testing on as many different systems as we can."

And to the cries of 'but it's just more of the same', I'd reply that when it's this good, what's the problem? In essence the game might be the same, but the improvements are real. It's *GTA III*, polished to perfection and wrapped up in the same unique humour, a fantastic '80s soundtrack (which gives instant lie to the claim that Rockstar is targeting children with its sick games), better visuals, new vehicles and weapons (including a chainsaw!) and a playing area that's more than twice as large as Liberty City. Can you tell that I'm just a wee bit excited? **[X2]**



"What were you saying about my driving?"



The new DX9 engine is stunning.



Up and atom...

RISE OF NATIONS

There's only one way to subdue a nation, and that's to bomb the crap out of it. Right? Wrong. **Keith Pullin** averts a crisis...



Some heavy cannons help out with a border skirmish against the Turks.



Wonders provide your nation with even more bonuses.



You can bombard cities from the sea and from the air.

CAST YOUR eyes around at these screenshots. Looks all right doesn't it? But hold on just a minute, haven't we seen this kind of thing before? OK, it was a few years ago now, but our memory isn't that bad, and if we're not very much mistaken *Rise Of Nations* looks suspiciously like *Age Of Empires*. We're not talking AoE2 either – we're talking about the first one.

"Yeah, people do have that first five second visual impression," explains Brian Reynolds, lead designer on *Rise Of Nations* and co-founder of Big Huge Games.

"Both games are RTSs about history, so there is a certain amount of natural visual similarity there," continues Reynolds, "however, when

people get their hands on *Rise Of Nations* and start playing it, they soon realise that when it comes to gameplay it's actually completely different. *RoN* does not play like a classic real-time strategy game. Plus, a lot of people have been to that buffet line now and they're comfortably full."



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Big Huge Games
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com
ETA May 23

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the first RTS to have national borders!
- 18 different cultures
- World domination campaign
- Large scope for diplomacy
- Hugely configurable



The British army advances. Note the coloured border on the ground.

CV

BIG
HUGE
GAMES

BIG HUGE GAMES

Founded in February 2000, *Rise Of Nations* is the company's first release. However, the founding quartet behind BHG have worked on the likes of *Civilization 2*, *Alpha Centauri* and *Colonization*. *RoN* has attracted a huge amount of praise already after being shown at various international shows. There's no doubt Big Huge Games have a very bright future ahead of them.

And do you know what? He's spot on. *RoN* actually has more in common with *Civilization* than *AoE*, *Empire Earth* or *Age Of Mythology* – not surprising considering Reynolds and Big Huge Games' other co-founders, Tim Train, David Inscore and Jason Coleman have between them worked on titles such as *Civilization 2*, *Colonization* and *Alpha Centauri*.

BORDER PATROL

So, although familiar RTS gameplay elements like collecting resources, building armies and attacking your opponent with everything bar the kitchen sink are still very much in evidence, *RoN* also draws you into a world where long-term economic strategy is just as important as short term military gains.

After playing the beta version for a good few days now, we think we may have discovered a depth that only the *War* series of games can claim to

Everywhere you look there are old innovations popping out at you, and though it's true that most of these ideas are not new to the world of turn-based gaming, they're certainly new to RTSs. *RoN*'s implementation of visual national borders is a prime example.

"I remember putting national borders in *Alpha Centauri*," recalls Reynolds. "It was an early concept of what we're doing now. It was pretty simple and I remember thinking to myself 'why don't any RTS

games have something like this?' We were surprised nobody had done it and thought it was time to try out some turn-based ideas in a real-time world."

And it works brilliantly. As you progress through a game, the borders of all nations expand or contract depending on a combination of factors ranging from number of cities under their control to economic and military strength. During one particularly intense engagement in which our intrepid British forces attempted to occupy Paris, the border constantly moved back and forth as we sacked the city and then lost it again after a series of feisty French counter-attacks.

LIBRARY CARD

The types of buildings you have in your cities also influences territory size. Universities, temples, libraries, market places, and Wonders all contribute to national strength.

Of the 20 or so civilian and military buildings available to you, the library is



Having fun down at the docks.

"We think we may have discovered a depth that only the *Total War* series of games can claim to equal"



Sticks and stones will break your bones.



After capturing a city, troops must hold it for two minutes.



Trade caravans travel and keep the economy alive.



Nothing quite like a good old-fashioned pitched battle.

probably the most important. Much of the game is spent visiting these hives of knowledge to research new technology and advance from one age to the next. In total there are ten different ages on offer starting with the Classical Age (1 BC) all the way through to the Information Age (2000 AD), as well as four separate research trees covering commerce, military, civic and scientific innovations.

The commerce aspect of technology allows you to create caravans that can be used to trade luxury resources between your cities and other nations. Goods such as tobacco, horses, diamonds, peacocks(!), relics and more can be uncovered on the map, again in a very

similar manner to the *Civ* games. And in a distinct nod towards *Civ 3*, commodities such as oil aren't even visible until you've attained a high enough level of research to recognise their importance.

MILITARY MIGHT

Military research speaks for itself obviously, but it also has another use. Interestingly, *RoN* doesn't use the 'hut' concept of army growth, ie the more homes your city has the larger your force. Instead, it's your level of military research that is directly responsible for the maximum amount of units allowed. In other words, the more military technology you've researched, the bigger your army –

it actually makes a lot of sense. One advantage of this is that you don't have sprawling shantytowns taking up half the map. Instead you're left with an uncluttered base leaving more space for

key buildings, and of course the odd Colossus, Eiffel Tower or Statue of Liberty. It also means that you can only reach the unit cap (200 units) towards the end of the game, thus virtually eliminating rush tactics early on.

Civic research concentrates on improving quality of life within your towns and cities. Granaries, lumber mills, mines – all that kind of thing can be researched here. And the final research trail, science, imparts important knowledge such as reading and writing, mathematics, physics and all those other egghead inventions that ultimately are likely to cause other nations a lot of pain.

NOT IN MY NAME

One thing a game focusing on the rise of dominant world powers needs is an interesting array of cultures, and Big Huge Games does not disappoint. Eighteen different playable cultures have been crammed into the game including Britain, France, Spain, Russia, China, and early Native American cultures such as the Mayans, Aztecs and Iroquois. But just how different can they be exactly? After all, is a Spanish archer so different from a British one?

"This is a game about history, so you're not going to get the Zeug and the Protos or something like that," says Reynolds. "But in the context of staying true to history we've made them pretty dramatically different. The Chinese can instantly build any economic unit and that's a huge power to have to be able to instantly pop them out at the drop of a hat. The



PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT

WE ALL REMEMBER PLAYING TRUMPS AT SCHOOL. IT'S TIME TO RELIVE THE GOOD TIMES...



Twenty different trump cards keep things interesting.

Another great innovation in the campaign mode is the ability to play trump cards before you go into battle. These cards, obtained by gaining territory or simply buying them, give your nation a variety of bonus abilities.

So, if you're about to invade a capital city which you know is going to be well defended you could play a card that might give you more starting troops, or even a card that allows faster research. There are around 20 different cards in total, however you can only play a maximum of five cards at once. Watch out though, in accordance with the Geneva Convention your opponents get to play their cards too.



If the Aztecs were around today, this is what their tanks would look like.

Q&A

BRIAN REYNOLDS



We chatted to the co-founder of Big Huge Games about the trials and tribulations of development.

PCZ *RoN* looks so similar to *AoE*, was this something you were initially wary of?

BR Not really. It's funny because the original *Age Of Empires* took a lot of its inspiration from *Civilisation*. But nowadays I think *AoE*'s visual style is something a lot of people are used to, and it lends itself well to showing a lot of historical flavourings in terms of colour and stuff.

PCZ So, you weren't tempted to go 3D?

BR *RoN* is actually a 3D engine, but we've kind of cheated a bit to make a lot of the buildings more detailed. So, because of that we don't rotate the camera. It was a choice we made and we also felt that once people are in an RTS game, they don't change the view that much anyway.

PCZ What has been the trickiest part of development?

BR At first we didn't know whether all these ideas we had would work. Sure, we knew they worked on turn-based games, but we had to do a lot of prototype testing to find out if stuff like the national borders would work on an RTS. In the end, we had to take some stuff out, such as happiness of the citizens because it was just too abstract.

PCZ What's the first game you ever played?

BR *Colossal Cave* – I played that in my dad's office.

PCZ What was the most recent game you played?

BR *Dungeon Siege*. I played that all the way through. I played a lot of *Warcraft III* as well, but I sucked at it!

Spanish start with the entire map revealed, their scouts see further and they get more bonuses for exploring than anyone else."

In fairness, both *AoE* and *AoM* offer similar kinds of cultural options, even if they don't have quite as many to choose from. But what neither of these games can offer is the ability to play everybody off against each other at the same time.

RISK-TAKING

By far the most impressive feature of *RoN* is the option to play the Conquer the World campaign. Unlike most RTSs that are content to offer a story and then take the player through this story mission by mission, *RoN* goes down the *Total War* route. Basically, a map of the entire world divided into territories (à la *Risk*) is shown on screen and it's up to you to dominate the planet as your chosen nation.

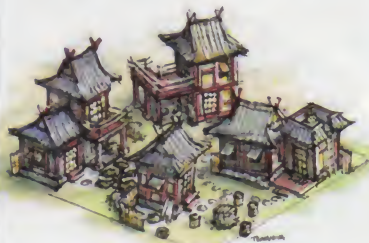
Each territory has certain bonuses associated with it. Some may have a supply centre that gives you an extra



A cruise missile weaves its way through the jungle.



Nice tanks, shame about the colour scheme



army, some may have high tribute rating (meaning more cash), whereas others could be rich in resources.

It's here where BHG's turn-based pedigree truly comes to the fore, because essentially that's exactly what this part of the game is: a turn-based strategy game. Fans of *Total War* will undoubtedly find the whole process remarkably familiar, but what *Total War* doesn't do is take this turn-based gameplay into the RTS portion of the game. So, once you've selected which territory to invade and begun the real-time battle, that ever present, ever shifting visual border on the ground allows you to picture in your mind the changing face of the entire world map.

"When the sword or the tank fail, you can always try to form alliances or treaties to buy yourself land"

Yet, as with most aspects of this game it's not all about military dominance. When the sword or tank fail, you can always try to form alliances or treaties to buy yourself land. *RoN*'s diplomacy options have come straight out of the *Civ* draw. Aside from the wheeling and dealing in the campaign mode there's also a standard game mode known as The Diplomacy Game.

GIVE DIPLOMACY A CHANCE

Here eight players negotiate their way to victory without spilling a drop of blood on the battlefield. It's a weird concept having an RTS game where you don't have to fight, but again the fact that the developers have actually stuck their necks out by trying something different is commendable. It's yet more evidence of the determination these people have to advance the RTS genre.

There are other options too that allow you to configure the game

settings to play as you like. For example, you can set it up so that you have no combat until the Gunpowder Age, or even arrange it so nations receive a series of forfeits if they set foot on enemy soil without proper authorisation.

Ultimately *RoN* offers so many ways to play and so many ways to win the game that it's hard to see how you would ever become bored of playing it. We've waited a long time for an RTS to truly

push forward the boundaries of gameplay, and in *RoN* we believe we may have found what we've been looking for. Watch for a review very soon. [\[PZ\]](#)



Each nation has a plethora of unique units.





How can you tell me this isn't
the best looking game ever?

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Egosoft
PUBLISHER TBA
WEBSITE www.egosoft.com
ETA TBA

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Possibly the most beautiful game in the world
- Realistically structured universe
- Single, group and capital ship combat
- You can fly about INSIDE the stations

Spacing out with...

X2: THE THREAT

In space no one can hear you chill out. **Paul Presley** kicks back, engages the jump drive and dreams of a spice empire

THIS VERY month, one of the most delayed games of all time dropped out of orbit and splash-landed in our reviews section. It's a nifty little space number called *Freelancer*, and it's been keeping hopes alive for a true modern-day successor to *Elite* for some five years now. We're talking big, freeform space opera, bursting with trade, exploration, combat, a little romance – well, you can read our verdict on page 60.

However, just as I was about to cancel my mail, declare myself captain of the good ship Presley and head out into the inky blackness of *Freelancer*, never to return, I received a call from Jamie 'Seffers' Sefton at ZONE HQ. "Prez, do you fancy popping in and taking a look at X2 with us?" My curiosity duly aroused, I turned up, only to find Seffers in the company of one Bernd Lehahn, head of X2 developer Egosoft, who promptly proceeded to blow my mind. For you see, *X2: The Threat* is a modest, unassuming space game, with barely a fraction of the production costs of *Freelancer*, yet, from what we've seen, it looks even better.

"*Freelancer* may be the closest rival, but from what I know about the game it still seems to be quite different from X2," comments Bernd when asked about the competing title. "I don't think it's possible in *Freelancer* to build your own factories, for example, and I think that this is partially because it does not have a simulated economy. I also think that its missions are more linear than ours.

that seemed superfluous and tacked on. Which, indeed, was the case. Egosoft's ultimate ambition was never *Star Trek* but *Elite*. The story was there because it was thought necessary. This time, Lehahn is under no illusions about his aims.

"From *X:BTF* to X2 we have made many steps towards our goal of total freedom," he says eagerly. "For example, you can control ships with many turrets

"From what we've seen, X2 looks even better than *Freelancer*"

Freelancer doesn't allow you to control large amounts of ships and extend your ships' computers. But this is really all just a lot of guessing. We haven't really looked at it yet. Too many 'I thinks'!" he laughs.

The original *X: Beyond The Frontier* was one of those titles that divided everyone who played it. Where some people saw sedate beauty and engrossing freedom, others saw dull monotony and confusing gameplay. Others still were faced with a storyline

manually or just sit inside one of the turrets while your ship computer steers the craft for you, all using a breadth of AI options. You can fly around inside factories and stations, but only if you want to. It isn't strictly speaking necessary – although we will be hiding some objects inside some stations for the truly dedicated pilot to discover. You can also extend your ship computer with lots of enhancements. You can add new commands to remotely control your ships

CV
EGOSOFT

EGOSOFT

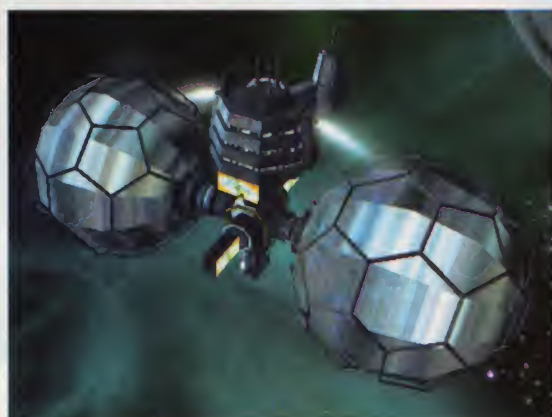
Germany's answer to David Braben comes in the shape of Bernd Lehahn, a tall German chap with a talented team behind him. The only real difference between Braben and Lehahn is that Bernd looks like releasing an actual game every now and then...

1993 *Flies Attack On Earth*. Interesting but somewhat, er, unremarkable FPS. Still, it's a start.

1999 *X: Beyond The Frontier* is released – and so it begins. *Elite* fans rejoice, *Wing Commander* fans can't get past the sedate pace of the game. Their loss.

2000 *X-Tension* arrives quelling some of the fears about longevity by ditching the story elements and going totally freeform. Fixed a few bugs too.

2003 *X2: The Threat* due to launch.



They're all based on toasters and coffee makers, apparently.



You'll get to fly everything from tiny fighters to the largest capital ships.

ADVANCED USERS ONLY!

DO YOUR OWN AI SCRIPTING WITH X2'S IN-GAME EDITOR

Halfway through his demo of X2, Bernd Lehahn showed Seffers and myself one of the innovations the game is bringing to the genre. It was about then that my brain put on its best shoes, left a note on the table and buggered off down the pub to drown itself in Highballs.

Apparently the game will ship with an editor that allows you to reprogram any or all of the game's AI routines in order to customise your fleet to behave exactly as you want. I'm not talking

about piddly little on/off switches for pre-programmed encounters or anything. We're talking full-on, Master's degree in computing, boffins-only editing software here.

Want your fleet of pirates to perform cunning bait-and-trap ambushes? Want a team of escort fighters to form a giant phallus every time they're attacked? As long as you can master the software you can pretty much have them do whatever you want.



Your fleet can be programmed to the nth degree.

which could, for example, allow pirating commands to be issued to send your fleet on a plundering mission or assign them to protect your stations."

DIY DEVELOPMENT

While it's fair to say that the team at Egosoft are a talented bunch of lads, it's also true that a great number of these gameplay ideas have come from the likes of you, fair reader, through X's huge online fan community.

"We've had a lot of feedback from the last two games. A hell of a lot," exclaims Lehahn. "It was always a big motivation for us to see how enthusiastically the many fans reacted and to hear their ideas and suggestions for us. The best thing is, it never stops. Even today, more than two years after X-BTF was first released, we get many such mails every day."

A lot of this comes by the way of DevNet - Egosoft's amateur coding community. "There is a very strong community of fans and we try to do what we can to help them and to communicate with them," he explains. "Mainly this happens through our website (www.egosoft.com). It has chat rooms, forums and a huge developer community,

"It's the kind of space that makes you want to blaze up a space doobie and marvel at the awesomeness of nature"

where people can get all the technical information needed to program the missions for our games." In fact, they're such a strong base of fans that many of them have even penned *X* fan fiction. Trekkies eat your hearts out.

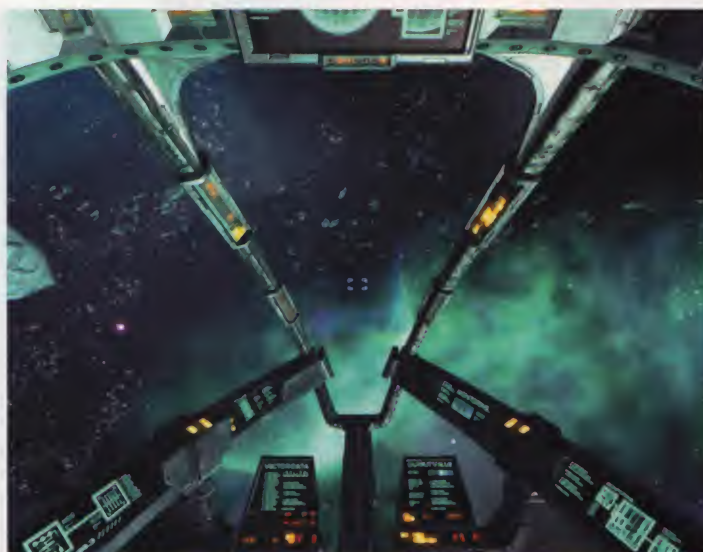
FLYING TOASTERS

Love or hate the original *X*, one area everyone couldn't help but agree on was its beauty. Well, *X2* is a million times better looking. It's the kind of space that makes you want to forget about the trading, the piracy and the hostile aliens and just blaze up a space doobie, put your feet up on the dashboard and sit there marvelling at the swirly colours and the awesomeness of nature. Man.

Which is why it's all the more bizarre to hear about the creative influences at work in the game. "Ideas really can be taken from everywhere," says Lehahn, "in fact some of the most beautiful ship designs are based on household appliances." Uh-huh. Somehow the thought of zipping about in a Breville sandwich maker of doom doesn't have the right feel.

"It was always important for us that the very unique races in the *X* universe are also recognisable by their ships and stations," Lehahn continues. "Take the Boron for example. They are originally underwater creatures so it just makes sense that they take some of the designs they developed in their home planet's oceans and adapt them to their space vehicles. Maybe for aesthetic reasons, maybe for more practical ones." As brilliant as *X2* looks however, there's still one small problem – finding someone to publish the damn thing. At the time of writing, Egosoft was in the middle of frenzied negotiations with an unnamed firm. "Finding a publisher for *X2* has been a bit chaotic," Lehahn explains. "But now things are looking really good. We are confident that we can announce the publisher for the game really soon."

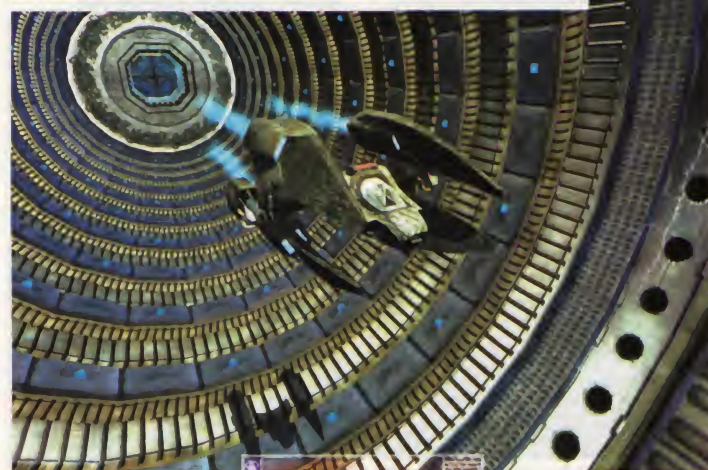
Let's hope so, because if *X2* lives up to both its own potential and the potential shown by the previous *X* titles then not a single wannabe space trader out there will be disappointed. And if not, well there's always *Freelancer*. **[X2]**



The latest work adds interactive cockpits and the ability to land on planets.



Combat isn't vital to the game, but is pretty damn impressive nonetheless.



Everything the *Elite* fan has ever asked for in a game.



Someone publish this game, now!

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

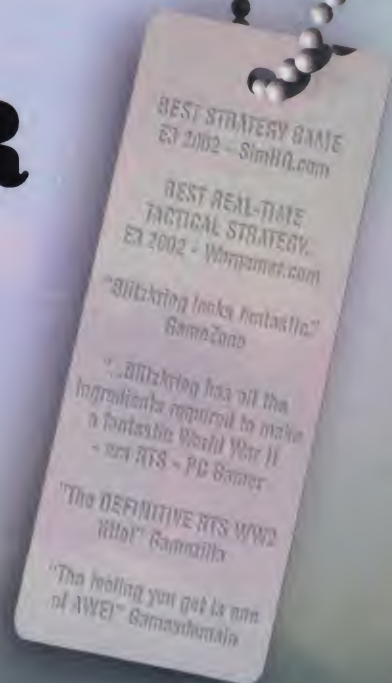
THE OLD 'MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER *ELITE*' PIPE DREAM COMES ONE STEP CLOSER TO REALITY



At the same time as making the most gorgeous space game ever, the lads at Egosoft have been toying around with an online version, previously covered in *ZONE* under the codename *X-Online*. Now with a new name, this is Egosoft's own take on the Holy Grail for space sim developers – a massive, freeform, online space universe. Bernd explains. "We have already been working on what we call *Online-Universe.net* for more than three years now. This is definitely our long term goal. Some of the cornerstones of that concept are already working, but it's much too early to say when *Online-Universe.net* (or *X2OL* for short) will be ready for a wider audience."

One of those cornerstones is the 'component' system that forms such a large part of *X2*'s in-game economy. With a theoretically ever-expanding universe (new sectors are added as more players register), the basic thrust of the online universe is to try and corner the market on particular components (say, Argon engines or Boron lasers) with other players supplying you the materials needed to build them. Intergalactic Richard Bransons apply here.

PLAY WAR, DON'T MAKE WAR



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APRIL 2003

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"The interface is completely clean and uncluttered, leaving the entire screen to the action"

Take heavy losses in an ambush and your troops might start bugging out.

Band of Bitmap Brothers...

WWII: FRONTLINE COMMAND

After the critical coup/financial fiasco of *Z: Steel Soldiers*, the old masters of Britsoft return with a beauty of an RTS. Mark Hill assumes command...

AS ANY fan of *Speedball*, *The Chaos Engine* or *Xenon* will tell you, the Bitmap Brothers know gameplay. Take *Z: Steel Soldiers*, their most recent offering. OK, so it didn't sell so well, but the gameplay was solid as a robot's ass. Luckily, the Bitmaps haven't taken their harsh lesson at retail too much to heart, and their latest effort looks just as stupidly playable as any of their games.

Though in many ways the most straightforward game the Bitmaps have ever attempted, *WWII: Frontline Command* is a fine-looking RTS set against the familiar milieu of war in Europe. While lacking the daring, almost arcade simplicity of *Steel Soldiers*, it's no manual-heavy military simulator either. Instead, the Bitmaps seem to be treading a middle ground that both casual and hardcore gamers can enjoy.

SMALL SOLDIERS

Being a bit of a spoon at military strategy, I can happily confirm that *Frontline* lets the less tactically minded among us enjoy some good old-fashioned toy soldering, while at the same time providing veterans with plenty of scope for complex and satisfying strategic decisions. One of the game's key strengths is the emphasis on

clever use of limited resources, frequently putting you at a numerical disadvantage and forcing a victory of wits. On the harder difficulty level you also have to struggle with secondary objectives and extra-tough conditions such as lack of ammo for your tanks and artillery.

Like *Z: Steel Soldiers*, the interface is completely clean and uncluttered, leaving the entire screen to the action and making everything fast and intuitive. While tanks

and other units can be ordered around singly, riflemen and other smaller units automatically form squads, a now familiar trick for reducing micromanagement.

The first set of missions leads up to the D-Day beach landings, culminating in a bullet-riddled *Saving Private Ryan* affair that plays like a zoomed-out version of



Demolish bridges to thwart your foe.



German fighters buzz US tanks in a French village.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER The Bitmap Brothers

PUBLISHER Koch Media

WEBSITE www.bitmap-brothers.co.uk

ETA May

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Balanced gameplay that will appeal to RTS novices and master strategists
- Improved 3D engine with shared line-of-sight
- Large levels, including an awesome Omaha beach landing
- Simple, intuitive interface

Medal Of Honor's Omaha Beach level.

As well as France, the cratered backdrops are provided by Belgium, Holland and, eventually, Germany itself.

SPIRIT LEVEL

Certain units in the game have special abilities. For example, engineers can set charges in buildings and commanders can use binoculars to increase your field of vision, à la *Sudden Strike II*. The commander has another purpose, though, since his presence serves to bolster troop spirits. This is another key to the game's potential strength, with your troops' actions being heavily governed by a powerful morale system. If morale gets too low – say, after a surprise ambush resulting in high casualties – they'll drop to their knees and mope uselessly for a while like a bunch of students who forgot to buy Rizlas. The hope is that, rather than the broad strokes painted by other morale systems, *Frontline Command* will offer a more meticulous and convincing portrait of troop behaviour.

Visually the game is solid, if not mind-blowing, enhanced by a fully 3D camera and satisfying zoom range. It may not have the fanfare of *Steel Soldiers*, but *FC* could be a bigger hit by far. **PC**



On harder levels, you have to watch ammo supplies as you pound your enemy.



In a first for the series, some levels are set entirely indoors.



Commandos has never aspired to be a simulation and this time it's more comic book than ever.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pyro Studios

PUBLISHER Eidos

WEBSITE www.pyrostudios.com

ETA Summer 2003

VOT IZ ZE BIG DEAL?

- Genre-ly speaking, the *Commandos* series is in a class of its own.
- Story driven campaigns that aim to flesh out the game's characters.
- More manageable bite-sized missions, with a greater emphasis on action.
- Plans to introduce a deathmatch flavoured multiplayer game for the first time.
- Graphically enhanced; with 3D character models and zoomy in-out indoor bits.

CV



PYRO STUDIOS

Billeted in sunny Madrid, Pyro Studios is Spain's most consistent games developer and has sold more than three million copies of *Commandos* and its sequels to date, ironically, most of them in Germany.

1998 After two years in development, Pyro releases its first game, *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines*.

1999 Originally planned as an expansion pack, *Commandos: Beyond The Call Of Duty* is released as a standalone game.

2001 Months later, *Commandos 2: Men Of Courage* finally hits the PC.

2002 Gonzalo Saurez, lead designer of *Commandos 1* and *2*, leaves Pyro Studios.

2003 *Praetorians* is released and Pyro looks set to prove it can carry on Gonzalo-less by releasing *Commandos 3* on time.

Reich 'n' roll...

COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN

The Men Of Courage are back. *Richie Shoemaker* heads to the beaches of Normandy (literally!) to join the cause...

PYRO STUDIOS has learnt the hard way that when offering a new game to the masses, less can often mean more. While far from disappointing, it is nonetheless a fact that *Commandos 2* went the proverbial bridge too far. As beautiful as each meticulous level was and despite the love poured into every pixel, the missions were just too big, the task for the player sometimes too daunting and the key to unlocking the next gargantuan level often identical to the last. Rest assured, the lads have learned their lesson, and for the next episode in the tactical WWII series we can expect a considerably more varied and well-paced experience.

DAS IST GUT, JA?

At first glance little has changed; the levels are as beautifully 2D and intricate as they always have been, the characters natural and convincingly animated – this time as proper 3D

polygonal models – and the interface enhancements allude to little above the cosmetic. Of course *Commandos 3*, now officially subtitled *Destination Berlin*, is not without some obvious graphical implants. There's a depth to the visuals that's unsurpassed in any isometric game I've ever seen, an effect achieved by the multilayered

environmental effects, such as the driving rain that overflows from guttering and drives into the ground rather than simply falling across the screen like some cheap visual trick.

FLESHING OUT

Then there are the dramatic set pieces and in-game cut-scenes that hope to provide a more story-driven experience than the previous games. In fact, the game begins in pre-War London, at the German Embassy, where the game's leading lads will be introduced. From there it's off to the Russian front and the besieged city of Stalingrad, before heading to Berlin, occupied France and finally the D-Day landings. Each level will be interspersed with in-engine cut-scenes, from Nazi marches through the Brandenburg Gate to Steve McQueen-style motorbike chases across the countryside, explosions tearing into the ground as you go. Needless to say all of this will provide a much-needed narrative thread through the





Natasha the seductress and Whiskey the faithful hound are nowhere to be seen. Sorry...

Forget behind enemy lines, this is almost in enemy's undercrackers.

game and flesh out what were previously rather flat characters.

And those explosions are rather spectacular too. As shadows of German bombers flick across the already ruined city of Stalingrad early in the game, their devastating payload doesn't just leave a trail of explosions and smoke, but collapsing rubble and tumbling masonry, even a few snapping timbers. As far as global devastation and human suffering goes, never has it looked lovelier.

"I think we could have made *Commandos* in 3D if we had wanted to," says lead designer Ignacio Perez. "The main question is, would gameplay have benefited? I don't think so. Will it have the same level of graphical details? Perhaps, but will people have

the PCs to enjoy that level of detail...? I don't think so, not yet."

DIRTY HALF-DOZEN

The aim of the game is to conduct a secret war from behind enemy lines,

"As far as global devastation and human suffering goes, never has it looked lovelier"

leading a handful of skilled operatives in their attempts to disrupt and sabotage the Nazi war effort, whether it's assassinating officers or destroying military installations.

And it's the nature of the missions themselves that has received the most

attention this time round. Where *Commandos 2* featured nine sprawling maps, its sequel currently has around 25 set across three campaigns (Stalingrad, Central Europe and D-Day). Pyro wants to blur the distinction between the traditional


concept of missions and campaigns, but instead of giving us one huge map to get lost in, the map will start small and expand as new events occur.

Missions will also evolve in a more cinematic fashion as you play through

them. Sudden bombing raids might change the lay of the land completely, adding new objectives and tactical difficulties. One mission sees you creeping into a town to set up an ambush, posting snipers in the church tower and planting mines and explosives. Then the next mission sees the action kick off, as hundreds of Nazi reinforcements bear down on you and the mission becomes one of survival, reminiscent of the last desperate battle from *Saving Private Ryan*.

"In terms of content," remarks Perez, "*Commandos 3* is going to have as much as *Commandos 2*. The difference is it will be structured in a different way. We don't want people to be playing the same map to death. Neither do we just want to add more maps and more characters for the sake of it. We don't want to make a game that's bigger, to say it contains more than 60 hours of gameplay. We want people to say, 'It took me 25 or 30 hours, but in that time I never did the same thing twice'."

Unless you decide to play through the game again of course, which even for *Commandos* veterans would be a first.

The most significant differences this time round are not graphical, but in the very essence of the game design. The plan of attack is simple; to make *Commandos 3* more accessible, varied and action-packed than any in the series so far. Somehow, I think they may just pull this one off. 

COMMANDOS VS KOMMANDOS

GET READY FOR ISOMETRIC DEATHMATCH

Undoubtedly the most enduring new feature planned for *Commandos 3* is the multiplayer mode, which for the first time in the series will offer a 'deathmatch' game. Little is being revealed at this late stage, but we're told that two player games will allow four soldiers on each team, with a healthy mix of Assault and Defend missions to choose from. How they'll play is anyone's guess but a 2D rendition of *Counter-Strike* might be an apt presumption, perhaps with a healthy dose of *Spy Vs Spy* for good measure. CTF and co-operative games are also being planned, but with the game's release tentatively scheduled for June, we find it odd that Pyro is keeping its cards so close to its chest on this subject. Either the developers are just being very secretive or it's all going horribly wrong back at base.



Multiplayer *Commandos* could be good.



The drop-down menus give access to all manner of spells and supernatural powers. The hide and seek spell makes ghosts momentarily visible to mortals.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sick Puppies
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive
WEBSITE www.ghostmaster.com
ETA May 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Innovative haunt 'em up gameplay
- 47 ghosts with 140 haunting powers between them
- Multiple ways of solving puzzles and progressing through missions
- Groundbreaking AI and a fully 3D interactive environment
- A genuine sense of humour

CV

SICK PUPPIES

Although *Ghost Master* is Sick Puppies' first game, the pedigree of the developers involved spans several decades. Here's a few of the notable titles head honcho Gregg Barnett and co have been responsible for.

1983 *Hungry Horace* was a *Pac-Man* clone starring an oddly deformed character. Nevertheless, eating packed lunches and scaring park guards made this a ZX Spectrum classic.

1985 The release of *The Karate Kid* movie had every kid practicing roundhouse kicks and crane stances, and *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* was the Speccy game to cash in on it all. For many, the finest pre-8-bit beat 'em up.

1999 Many of the Sick Puppies team worked on all three of the *Discworld* games, culminating in this, the third incarnation of the sorely missed point 'n' click adventure series.

Ghouls paradise...

GHOST MASTER

Rhianna Pratchett goes over to the other side

I'VE BEEN seeing dead people everywhere. I've heard their shrieks, their moans, the endless rattling of chains and echoes of maniacal laughter. I've witnessed the ectoplasm flowing freely – oh yes! I've seen what it can do. They might tell me that Dave's seeing *Vice City* in New York, but I know he's been sucked clean through the floor by some demonic force. As for the flicker on Martin's monitor, I can see the gremlin curled on the top of it, teasing me with its infernal

chattering. Though some might say I've just been playing *Ghost Master* too long, I alone know the truth.

SLIME ME BABY

As a conduit between the worlds of the living and the dead, I feel it's only fair to tell you a bit more about the game we've been rattling our chains about for the past eight months, now I've had a chance to spend some quality time with an early playable version. As a quick recap for

those of you that didn't catch our last preview, *Ghost Master* is a game about being an undead civil servant who guides a team of spooks through various haunted locations in the town of Gravenville, solving puzzles, freeing restless spirits and scaring mortals.

And we have to say that the way the game actually plays, in terms of pace and gameplay, is different from anything else out there at the moment. Or more accurately, it combines elements of other



Were you expecting Casper, perchance?



A petrified maiden is sent fleeing into the night.



The opening movie is pure *Scooby Doo*.



Brains in jars have feelings too, don't you know?



Some sucker's been walled up by a sweet old lady, Edgar Allan Poe-style.

"Ghost Master isn't just about creating havoc, it's about watching it unfold to see if it's having the desired effect"

GHOST IN THE MACHINE

SPIRITS OF GAMING PAST

Despite the popularity of ghosts and demons in the movies, their appearance in gaming has been surprisingly limited. Among the exceptions of note are 1996's underrated LucasArts heaven-and-hell simulation *Afterlife*, and EA's *Haunting: Starring Polterguy*, put out on the Mega Drive back in the early '90s.

Haunting was a third-person character-driven strategy/adventure game revolving around a *Beetlejuice*-style teenage ghost called Polterguy, whose mission was to search the underworld for ectoplasm. There are more than a few similarities with *Ghost Master* in this forgotten nugget – at least in terms of concept – as Polterguy needed the ectoplasm to help him take revenge on the snooty and nefarious Sardini family by scaring them from their homes. With flying skulls and sofas that growled, it was the game the words 'ghoulish-romp' were made for.



Giant bats in the sideboard in EA's *Haunting: Starring Polterguy*.



The interface makes keeping track of mortals an easy task.

titles in such a way that makes it stand apart from any one genre. Playing a game that doesn't involve you shooting something, building food stalls or pushing a human/monster/tank around a map can be something of a surreal experience in itself. *Ghost Master* really feels like the freshest thing on the menu.

FEELING FUNKY

It's the AI in *Ghost Master* that, in a similar way to titles such as *Black & White* or *The Sims*, forms one of the most predominant and innovative features in the game. However, as creative director and founder of Sick Puppies, Gregg Barnett, explains, it's also proved one of the hardest to implement. "Getting the mortal AI to act

like B-movie characters has been the trickiest problem by far. It's been a roller coaster ride of making the AI generate unique behaviour, then realising with testing that deterministic behaviour is better for gameplay as it lends some predictability to proceedings.

"The end result is lots and lots of behaviour that is reasonably predictable if the player uses similar techniques on the same characters, but still exhibits surprising left field antics when you least expect it. But only in ways that don't go against the gameplay."

Ghost Master isn't just about creating havoc with your selected team of ghosts. It's all about watching it unfold to see if it's having the desired effect. When you scare



Mortals won't just react to ghosts – they'll react to each other's fear as well.



Mortals call handymen to fix things.



Missions get bigger as you go.

rattle of the old chains will have them on their feet in no time.

Likewise, if you need to capitalise on the innate curiosity of your mortal playthings you'll have to keep an eye on how they react to your haunting spells. For example, one of the basic puzzles you

need to solve is to get a mortal to open a boarded-up door so they discover a body. If you place a ghost in the room you want them to get into and use a noise spell to attract them, you'll see the mortals prick up their ears, go to the door, look puzzled and eventually – when you've made enough of a commotion – get somebody to break it down.

TRICK OR TREAT

It's these puzzle elements of *Ghost Master* that form the majority of the gameplay, and the objectives of the missions usually revolve around completing tasks set for you by local ghosts (spirits that have died and subsequently ended up haunting a particular location). Once you've completed their requests, the ghouls



a mortal, their terror level goes up and they run away. If you leave them too long without giving them another shock, their fear level will return to normal and you'll have to start the process again.

When trying to terrify one particular mortal, this means you have to follow them around making sure they're kept in a state of abject terror by using your ghosts to, say, levitate objects around them or chill the room. If they try sleeping, a quick

"Keep mortals in a state of abject terror by using ghosts to levitate objects around them"

SPIRITS OF CELLULOID

SPOTTING THE MANIFOLD FILM REFERENCES IN *GHOST MASTER* IS A GAME IN ITSELF – HERE ARE A FEW TO WHET YOUR APPETITE

THE EXORCIST

In the film world the church's anti evil-spirit squad battle with the forces of darkness and incontinent young ladies doing unsuitable things with crucifixes. In the game, things are not quite so dramatic, with the bible brandishers there to wrestle ghosts from your grasp for the duration of a mission.

THE CRAFT

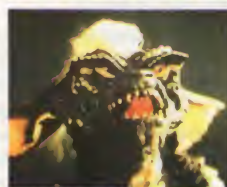
Wiccans and those who study the occult can be used to a *Ghost Master*'s advantage here, as thankfully they appear in the game more like Neve Campbell in *The Craft* than Christopher Lee in *The Wickerman*. A well-timed appearance during a séance, for example, can send everyone wailing into the night.

GHOST BUSTERS

Let's face it, these guys made jump-suits look cool. But then it was 1984. By the time the sequel came out, every ghost in New York knew that you never slime a guy with a positron collider. *Ghost Master* has its own equivalent spirit snatchers in the form of Ghost Breakers, who, like Exorcists, will try and capture your ghosts.

GREMLINS

It's those cute and cuddly creatures that turn nasty after a post-midnight snack. Who can blame them – when you're stuck in American small-town hell with Phoebe Cates, something's got to give. The gremlins in *Ghost Master* love messing around with electrical objects and generally causing havoc. Carol singing in woolly hats is sadly not an option.



Maxine Factor is an obsessive, abrasive Avon lady with a snake hairdo.



Relax – the towels stay on.

in question will join your team. What the puzzles involve varies considerably from ghost to ghost.

There's the geek ghost who wants to get even with the frat jock who bullied him in the mortal realm. Another is a weather witch who's desperate to extricate her ashes from the vacuum cleaner they were sucked into. And then there's the disembodied brain in a jar who wants to be saved from the indignity of becoming the butt of a student's practical joke. Freeing them might be as simple as setting off the right spell at the right time, or as complicated as cajoling mortals into carrying out a complex chain of tasks. Although in later scenarios, fear isn't always your primary weapon, as you may need to calm a distressed mortal before they'll act rationally.



Nothing like a few spiders to get those girlish shrieks going.

"We're still getting the balance right between sim-style play and puzzle play – not to mention making sure the puzzles aren't too brain taxing. But the gameplay is shaping up nicely," explains Gregg. "It's such a unique blend of elements that it does take a lot of testing and tweaking to get it right, and there are no commercial prototypes out there, so to speak. But I'm sure it is going to be something special."

CANDYMAN, CANDYMAN, CANDY...

There's no ignoring the fact that the 3D engine behind *Ghost Master* is extremely sophisticated. You can zoom in and out or rotate the camera with ease – even zip from floor to floor while checking the climate of fear. In fact, we wouldn't be surprised to see the same kind of



This guy died in the chimney and now his bones are stuck there.

for example. They're competing for mortals to scare away – a much more difficult design concept. An in-game editor was simply a road too far for the first version. With a fully original game, you can't do everything. You must focus on getting the core game right first. We'd be here forever if we'd tried to do

multiplayer now, but doing it in the future will enable us to get it right. Then, everybody will be able to recreate their own homes and offices and scare the pants off their friends and colleagues!" Ghosts in the office? Believe me it will happen – I've seen it, and soon my pretties, you will see it too. [X]

SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

ZEN AND THE ART OF GOOD GHOST MASTERING

All of the 47 ghosts in *Ghost Master* are divided into families. There are six main such groups: Sprites, Disturbances, Elementals, Vapours, Frighteners and Horrors. Each of these is again divided into a sub-family with, for example, Gremlins and Wisps both being part of the Sprite family. Each family has certain haunting powers in common, although these diversify with each ghost. The type of family your ghost belongs to will also affect which areas of a house they can haunt. For example, Ghastly, the young man showing off in the screenshot here, can only be bound or fettered to areas or objects which radiate emotional disturbance. These can be as obvious as a murder site or as obscure as a stuffed moose's head.



The 'family' your ghost belongs to determines which areas they can haunt.

REVIEWS

4.23 FROM WATERLOO



■ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

▲ This month, due to popular demand, I'm pleased to announce the return of the Supertest photo shoot. After last month's 'Top 10 Supertest Images' feature, we were inundated with letters (four at the last count) demanding that we bring back the humiliating snaps of us dressed like fools, which accompany our monthly discussions.

Hiring the upstairs of a pub – The Green Man in Riding House Street, W1 (that's my contractual obligations met), Mark dressed up like the kid from school you'd always try to knock the specs off with a back-handed slap, while Richie used his Jedi powers to turn himself into a croaking pointy-eared midget. I donned a GI uniform, while Hill just posed naturally. Turn to page 94 and check out the finished result.

However, compared to what I had to do earlier that day, the Supertest was quite dignified. I found myself standing on platform 16 at Waterloo station, dressed in a tank top, orange mac, stupid hat, glasses and comedy teeth, doing a photo shoot for my new magazine project PC Platformer (turn to page 146 to find out more). With commuters giving me quizzical 'who the hell is this arsehole' looks, matters were made worse when a group of real train spotters, brandishing clip-boards, but strangely bereft of thermos flasks, wandered past and fixed me with the kind of stares of contempt society usually reserves for them. Minutes later, station security were alerted to our presence and accosted us about using flash photography on the platform. Attempts to pacify them with piss-weak Ki-Ora sadly proved futile, and we were politely asked to leave.

Quite frankly, I couldn't get out of those clothes fast enough, but those trains were fascinating, especially the 4.23 from Waterloo, which was a very rare 2863 model. You can tell by its... Shoot me now. Please!

| Sunday 4.10.2002 19:00 | | Raúl (Real Madrid) | |
|---|-------------|---|--|
| | | Forward (Left/Centre), Spanish (57 caps/29 goals), Age 25 | |
| Profile | Information | History | |
| Technical Crossing 17 Dribbling 20 Finishing 20 Heading 16 Long Shots 17 Long Throws 12 Marking 11 Passing 18 Penalty Taking 13 Set Pieces 16 Tackling 13 Technique 20 | | Mental Aggression 8 Anticipation 18 Bravery 17 Creativity 17 Decisions 20 Determination 20 Flair 20 Influence 20 Off The Ball 20 Positioning 17 Teamwork 16 Work Rate 17 | |
| | | Physical Acceleration 17 Agility 17 Balance 9 Jumping 14 Pace 17 Stamina 17 Strength 14 Goalkeeper Rating 3 Condition 100% Preferred Foot Left Only Morale Superb | |

It's here, but was it worth the wait? Turn to page 56 to find out our verdict on one of this year's most-anticipated games.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets

reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make then please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'. This feature will begin next month.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our top-end rig, the Area-51 from Alienware.



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

GTA: Vice City Beta



JAMIE SEFTON

Soldier Of Fortune 2 and AvP2

What are you currently playing?

Who's the worst manager in the Premiership?

Alex Ferguson – two years without trophies says it all.

Terry Venables. Because he brought Okon to Leeds.



72

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
Let the battle commence...



80

POSTAL 2
Gary Coleman turns nasty



90

RE-RELEASES
Older games at a budget price



94

SUPERTEST
Best games based on film licences

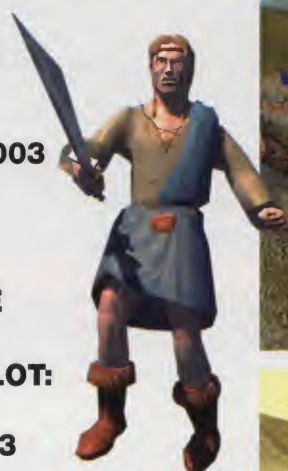
DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

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INCLUDING *DEUS EX*, *TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3*, *IL-2 STURMOVIK*, *MDK2*, *COMANCHE 4* AND MANY MORE.

MULTIPLAYER REVIEW OF *COMMAND AND CONQUER: GENERALS*

BATTLE OF THE FILM-LICENSED GAMES. *HARRY POTTER VS AVP2* VS *JEDI KNIGHT 2: JEDI OUTCAST* VS *EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE* VS *THE THING*



60



64



66



MARTIN KORDA

Warrior Kings: Battles

Glenn Roeder. 'Cos he ain't got a clue.



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault

What's a Premiership?



RHIANNA PRATCHETT

Age Of Mythology and Warrior Kings: Battles

Don't care, never will.



MARK HILL

Championship Manager 4

Glenn Roeder. The man doesn't have a pulse.



KEITH PULLIN

Rise of Nations Beta

Alex Ferguson, because he fancies himself too much.



PAUL PRESLEY

Freelancer

Alex Ferguson for not knowing when to get out.



There's nothing more satisfying than seeing your tactics in action, and fixing things that go wrong.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

■ £34.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Sports Interactive | ETA: March 28
www.sportsinteractive.co.uk

REQUIRES PIII 600, 96Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.6GHz, 512Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

All hail the return of the champ. Yes, Steve Hill's back for another season of footie-management heaven

INPERSPECTIVE

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 01/02

Reviewed Issue 108, Score 92%
 Mere words and numbers will never suffice again after *CM4*, although the budget price could persuade you otherwise.

TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2003

Reviewed Issue 121, Score 77%
 Not bad, but not particularly good either. However, if you want to watch your expensively assembled team's performances in 3D, then this is your best bet.

THIS IS

the big one. Forget goblins, motor racing and guns – the release of *Championship Manager 4* is the single most important gaming event this year. A brave new world for the series, it's the biggest gamble developer Sports Interactive has ever taken. If you've been living under a stone for the last year, know this: *Championship Manager 4* features moving graphics, thus bucking a trend that has seen the series flourish over the past

decade. This may not become immediately apparent from a perusal of the surrounding screenshots – and admittedly you won't be needing a new 3D card to make it all happen – but nevertheless the inclusion of a real-time, 2D match engine represents a major departure for the game, and it will undergo intense scrutiny from the fanatical *CM* community.

So how does it work? And more importantly, does it work? In answer to the first question, it

works by showing the match action from an overhead perspective, with players represented by circles bearing their squad numbers and, when the ball is near them, their surnames – something akin to ProZone, the tactical aid used by many Premiership clubs, and used briefly to such ill effect by Terry Venables on last year's *The Premiership* show.

The ball itself is represented by a yellow dot, which, to represent perspective, gets larger when hoofed into the air. Of course, the concept of a 2D engine isn't actually an original one, as it was employed to some effect in Sierra's *Ultimate Soccer Manager* back in the mid-90s. However, *CM4*'s interpretation is the most complex yet, offering an exceptional level of detail.



There's more media interaction than ever before.

2D OR NOT 2D?

So does the 2D match engine work? Well, the only real way to ascertain this is to go back to the text-only mode. And after weeks of playing it with full match highlights on, it's nothing less than an appalling travesty to revert to mere words. Panic sets in as you realise that you're missing the action, and it's the videogame equivalent of the sickening feeling that hits you upon hearing a roar from the crowd while stuck in the pie queue. Every football supporter's fear of missing a goal is realised, and simply having the action described seems woefully inadequate when you can actually watch the build-up, and watch as the ball is hammered into the net, replete with exuberant celebration. And as well as watching games live, all the highlights are available to view afterwards, even in slow motion, enabling you to



Team instructions are much more involved And a hell of a lot more intuitive to implement too.

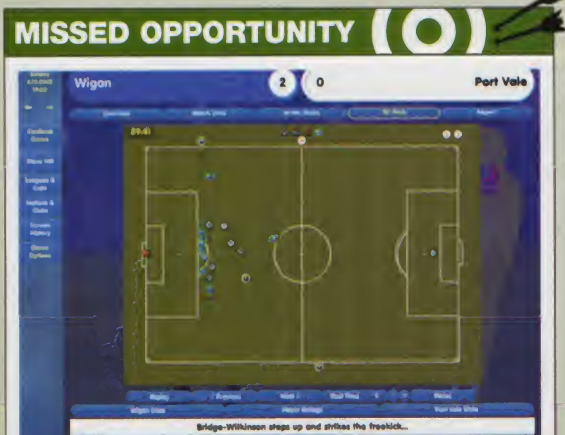
scrutinise the action to an entirely absurd degree.

CLICK TO KICK

We can safely call the match engine a success then, but what about the rest of the game? Suffice to say it has by no means been ignored, and has effectively



Aptly described as a Wonderkid - the mighty Roonaldo.



Trouble is, you can't tear your eyes away from the engine.

It might have been an idea to be able to see your players' individual ratings alongside the match action, thus avoiding the risk of missing a goal while switching screens.

been rewritten from the ground up, proving virtually unrecognisable from the yearly incarnations of CM3. As a vague analogy, it's a bit like the difference between Windows 98 and Windows XP, a dangerous comparison that will give gleeful ammunition to know-nothing fools who seek to deride the game as little more than a glorified spreadsheet.

Conversely, the interface for CM4 is a joy to behold, an entirely intuitive experience that puts the world of football at your fingertips. Right-clicks, hotkeys - the whole thing has been streamlined to minimise the time spent dicking about. For example, you're in the middle of a game and you like the look of an opposition player. Simply go to the Player Ratings page, right click on his name and assign a

scout to watch him, or even make an offer on the spot, barely missing a beat with the match in progress. There are countless such little touches, and many can be attributed to the unofficial return of Sports Interactive co-founder Oliver Collier. Having left SI a couple of years ago to concentrate on a Life of Reilly, the younger Collier brother felt the draw of *Champ Man* too strong to resist, spending the last few months of development tweaking the interface, all the while remaining in denial.

MORE! MORE! MORE!

As for other new stuff, there is naturally absolutely shitloads of it. The *Championship Manager* machine doesn't stop simply because there hasn't been a game out for a while, and researchers are constantly being



Even on the fastest machines it can take an age to go from one game to the next.

Wednesday 7.8.2002 21:45

Real Madrid
Offer McManaman

Transfer Value
Real Madrid's Steve McManaman is currently valued at £8,750,000.

Basic Offer
Offer Type: Transfer
Fee: £8,750,000

Clubs To Target
Liverpool
Arsenal
Chelsea

Comments
- McManaman has a minimum release fee clause of £49,000,000.

"Not watching the match engine is the equivalent of the sickening feeling you get hearing the roar of the crowd while stuck in the pie queue"

4.0.1 Cancel Proposal Under Changes Make Proposal

You can now offer players you want to offload to any clubs you think might be interested.

Normal Mode 72

Burton Albion 0 Chester 3

Conference Table

| Rank | Team | P | A | F | Diff | Points |
|------|-------------|----|---|---|------|--------|
| 1 | Woking | 10 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 29 |
| 2 | Leigh RMI | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | Hullfax | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| 4 | Farnborough | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| 5 | Grayswood | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 11 |
| 6 | Scarborough | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |

Glavos is coming on for Rickwood.

Steve Hill's quest for European glory with Chester continues.

added and real world information updated. They finally drew the line at 39 leagues, each incorporating new-fangled transfer regulations as appropriate to the respective nations. The transfer system itself has also been updated, with far more elaborate

contracts available. As well as the usual bonuses and clauses, there are options such as a yearly wage increase, and even the ability to set a buy-back price for a player.

As a manager you can be far more pro-active. For instance, when clubs express an interest in one of your players, rather than waiting for them to dither over it, you can approach the club and offer the player directly. Players are also treated more like human beings, with a new Happiness rating, as well as the incorporation of their minor concerns and major concerns – the idea being to tend to the former before it becomes the latter. You can even do a Ferguson and withdraw them from the national squad, or do a Houllier and insist that they only play a half.

TICTACS

Tactical instructions are now also far more complex. Individual player instructions can be tweaked to the extent that you can tell a winger whether to cross from deep or get to the

Sunday 6.10.2002 19:00

Everton 1 Arsenal 0

Overview Match Stats Action Stats 3D Pitch Report

69:39

Gravessen sends the ball forward to Campbell

4.0.1 Exit Highlight

The desire to watch whole matches can mean seasons go on forever.


touchline, and even where to aim for, such as the near post or the incoming attacker. Likewise for set pieces, enabling you to design corners and free kicks in some detail, with options to take them long or short, play the ball to the near post, far post, edge of the area and so on. The same applies to defending set pieces, and you can now elect to put men on the posts, and even decide who you want to mark their tallest player, for instance.

In other news, media interaction has been increased hugely, and you can now effectively carry out extended arguments with your players through the press. There is now an under-19's side along with the reserves, and the Assistant Manager now takes on a greater

importance as well, and will even pick the team for you if asked. He will also advise on transfers and contracts, which can be useful for the seasoned player and invaluable for the newcomer.

BOYS DONE GOOD

Suffice to say there are things in the game that will only become apparent after months of play. All you need to know is that the gamble has paid off and you will be playing this for the foreseeable future. That said, I'm not entirely addicted yet, and am still hankering for my most recent game of CM01/02, with the mighty Chester on the cusp of their inaugural Champions League campaign. However, I know that common sense must prevail, and I've just got to get

on with it. CM4 is like moving into a new house. It takes some settling in, but eventually you become comfortable and consider it home. I think I'll be more than happy here. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ The match engine
- ✓ Intuitive interface
- ✓ Loads of new features
- ✓ Life-sappingly addictive
- ✗ Needs a hefty PC to run smoothly
- ✗ Transfer market not as much fun

90

Goodbye cruel world

CALLING ALL MANAGERS

CHAMP MAN ONLINE

When we first heard about CM4, one of the biggest things it was going to do was add online play. But don't expect to join leagues as easily as you would a Counter-Strike match. CM4 is still only a network game, designed primarily for LAN, but now you can enter a particular ISP address to join a game in progress. We can't comment on how well this works yet (look out for an update very soon), but at least it should ensure you play against people who are taking it as seriously as you.



The arcade-like action is fast, furious and incessant.

FREELANCER

£29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Digital Anvil | ETA: April 18
www.microsoft.com/games/freelancer

REQUIRES PIII 600MHz, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D Card
DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D Card

A game about waking at noon and watching *Neighbours* in your pants? Paul Presley is about to be sorely mistaken



Fair enough, you may have criticisms of this free-form space combat sim/trading game's simplistic level of combat controls, its fixed and unrealistic economy system, the repetitive nature of the animated sequences and the annoying way pirates will always track your ship no matter who

else is around. But the one thing you can't accuse *Freelancer* of being is boring. It'd be like having a go at *Boys And Girls* for being highbrow. And unless you are even less evolved than the sub-detritus of British humanity, which appears on that show

INPERSPECTIVE

EARTH AND BEYOND

Reviewed Issue 126, Score 75%
 Supposedly an online Epic for the next generation. Except that it wasn't all that great.

X - BEYOND THE FRONTIER

Reviewed Issue 82, Score 90%
 Well, it's a little long in the tooth now, but it was great in its day and the sequel (see our preview on page 42) promises to give you everything *Freelancer* wasn't able to deliver.

HARD AS IT may be to believe, I've actually read people criticising *Freelancer* (or the recently released demo at any rate) for being boring. Boring! Unless these people are regularly employed as naked lion riders, live in naturist communes with groups of frisky supermodels and list their hobbies as starting South London turf wars, then it's impossible to see where they're coming from on this.



Controlling your ship with a mouse is intuitive and easy to pick up.

as contestants (using the term 'human' as loosely as possible), you're hardly likely to do that.

Anyway, *Freelancer*. I don't think I've ever come across a game that tries harder to keep things happening around you at all times. Barely a minute goes by that you're not blasting ships from the sky, zipping from one colourful part of the galaxy to another, or becoming entangled in some malevolent conspiracy involving aliens (as every conspiracy has to do at some

point these days – have you heard the latest one about Kennedy and... well, perhaps I've said too much already). If you looked up the phrase 'action-packed' in a dictionary, there'd just be a big picture of *Freelancer*. Blowing something up. While parachuting off a mountain. Nude.

So, onto the obligatory recap paragraph for newcomers. Although considering the amount of buzz being generated in website forums,

on newsgroup servers and at gatherings of the Women's Institute in Burnley, you'd have to have been living in a cave for the past three years not to know anything about *Freelancer*. *Freelancer* is the latest attempt to bring *Elite*'s style of open-ended space trading goodness to a Modern Gaming Audience.

As they are aiming their game squarely at a Modern Gaming Audience (quick, call the trademark office) there's no way *Freelancer*'s developers, Digital Anvil, would have got away with just plonking a free-form universe on your doormat. Instead we have to suffer the almost

mandatory sci-fi story (or 'scify' as my grandmother used to call them) that weaves its way through the randomly generated missions and trading routes much as a gastric ulcer weaves its way through the lining of your stomach.

TALE-TELLING

Actually, that's unfair. *Freelancer*'s story sequences are very nicely done. The introductory sequence is one of the finest I've seen in many a year, the engine-based cut-scenes that accompany your travels are extremely well scripted, edited and, yes, acted. The plot is intriguing

enough to keep you going through the early stages, and the way that story missions add moments of genuine tension and nerve-shredding action to the slightly repetitive free-form parts of the game is as welcome as it is effective.

Except that it doesn't last long enough. Much like the male orgasm, just as the story starts to get going, it's all over and you're left with a strange feeling of emptiness and uncertainty as to whether you should hunt for your pants and leave, or stick around a bit longer in case this brief moment of excitement ends up somewhere more lasting.

"Freelancer is the latest attempt to bring *Elite*'s style of open-ended space trading goodness to a Modern Gaming Audience"



Fly from one star system to the next trading your wares.



There are a multitude of weapons and ship upgrades to be bought and exploited.

MAKING A QUICK BUCK

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRADING GAME GENRE

Of course, this all kicked off with *Elite*, the original and, in many a view, the best space trader of all time. Ferrying narcotics, human slaves and luxury foods about the galaxy in your Cobra Mk. III is an experience the few of us lucky enough to have had will forget.

There have been many takes on the genre since. *Privateer* was the first to combine space trading with a storyline. *Ultima Online* saw a whole community gathering resources and selling them to each other. *High Seas Trader* saw you ferrying silks and spices across 14th century Europe while avoiding scurvy.

But the zenith (or perhaps nadir) for me has to be *Minder*. Based on the popular show off the telly, it was the only game that let you deal in used prophylactics and cardboard *Blue Peter* presenters. Class. Go here (www.minder.org/mindplay/mindplay.htm) now and feel the love.

By the way, I was on a train with Dennis Waterman last week. I couldn't believe how rough he looks these days...





SECOND OPINION

KEITH PULLIN

I'm not looking for the modern day version of *Elite* for the very good reason that it's never going to happen. Let's face it – no matter how hard anyone tries, that work of art will never be beaten. Personally, whenever I get the urge to play *Elite* (and it happens about once a year) I play it on an emulator – and that's good enough for me.

So, while I agree that *Freelancer* is indeed a lot shallower than the *Elite*-bashing hype from Microsoft and Digital Anvil was suggesting, I still find myself hopelessly addicted simply because it's a superbly executed arcade game.

The action is relentless, the twisting, conspiracy-based plot is gripping, and as a nice little bonus, it's probably the single-most gorgeous-looking game I have ever seen.

In short, when it comes to pure, compelling entertainment, *Freelancer* is by far the best title I've played this year.

Whereas the story drives your progress in the first part of the game – your trading, bounty hunting, pirating and so on are all helping you work towards reaching each new chapter – once it's over you're left to explore the rest of the universe by yourself, free to make money however you want. Except that you can't really think of a reason why you should bother.

Save that you're a graphics whore and you can't wait to discover which colour theme the designers have picked for the next star system.

MORE OF THE SAME

Early on it becomes obvious that each new planet and space station is just a slightly different version of the previous one (sometimes not even that dissimilar). A Rhineland freighter doesn't handle very differently to a Bretonia freighter. Running assassination missions for Cryer Pharmaceuticals is the same as running assassination missions for Samura Industries. Only the names change.

What Digital Anvil needed to do was make the background story far deeper than it was, having it stretch on way into the higher levels, rather than peter out around level 20 or so. A quick look back at the somewhat chequered production history of *Freelancer* is probably enough to let you realise why there wasn't the time and/or resources to do this (Digital Anvil has been the subject of more changes of leadership than an Italian government, and *Freelancer* has undergone more restarts than a 100m Sprint race run by hyperactive nine-year olds after a sugar injection). But that doesn't change matters. It ends

"Freelancer doesn't create a realistic universe for you to live in, but it does create a playable one"



Graphically, few other games come close to *Freelancer*.

up feeling like DA made half a great game but was then forced to get it out the door before it had a chance to finish it off. Even if it did take it five years to get this far.

FREEDOM IS ILLUSORY

Everywhere you look you can see the veneer of freedom, but any lengthy inspection soon shows up the abundant limitations. Enemy ships will always target you, no matter what the situation. They may be surrounded by police ships or bounty hunters, but it's always you they come after because you're the only really living thing around. Sometimes it feels like *The Truman Show* in space.



Your ship can be comfortably controlled from two viewpoints.

Running freelance missions is supposedly the driving force of the game – hence the name – with the option to offer your services to several dozen different employers. But since there's only a stock of about five mission types to choose from (the only differences being the names of the people involved and the number of enemies you face), the whole system soon feels like more of a repetitive chore than a game with infinite freedom. There aren't even any of *Elite*'s passenger or delivery missions that at least allowed you to combine freelancing with trading runs for extra cash and variety.

Freelancer constantly presents an exciting impression

of a gloriously detailed universe rich in colour and variety, but it rapidly displays its own shortcomings whenever you start looking too closely. Sort of like Ant & Dec.

BUT, BUT, BUT

Now here's the rub. Despite all of that, despite all the ways in which *Freelancer* gnaws at your patience like an insane beaver, it's still an incredible blast to sit down and play. In the same way that I found myself able to look past all of *Hidden & Dangerous*'s bugs, able to cope with *Operation Flashpoint*'s idiosyncratic game design and able to forgive *Counter-Strike*'s flagrant abuse by hacking tools, so too

WOT, NO JOYSTICK?

IF IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR HAN SOLO...

A lot of the online fuss has been caused by *Freelancer*'s lack of joystick support. Much wailing and gnashing of teeth has issued forth from die-hard *Elite* fans who refuse to countenance playing a space game with anything other than a Thrustmaster Special stuck between their legs.

Well, the good news is it doesn't make a whit of difference. Actually, it improves the game. Using a mouse, the controls are as fluid and as non-intrusive as you could hope for, and the game is all the better for it. Besides, Han Solo didn't fly the Falcon with a stick, did he? And you wouldn't argue with him, would you?



Pure, unadulterated mayhem. Action fans won't be disappointed.



"It's *Wing Commander* with a touch of *Elite* bolted on the front for a bit of added scope"

I find myself more than able to get beyond the flaws that run through *Freelancer*.

Somehow none of it matters. Something about it all hooks you in regardless of the manifest limitations – something makes you willing to let yourself be fooled by the paper-thin mask of completeness it wears. You may know what lies behind the Wizard's curtain but you're willing to live the lie because Oz is such a nice place to be in. There's a lot to be said for atmosphere and it's here that we witness one of *Freelancer*'s key strengths.

BACK IN KANSAS

As I said right at the start (well, near the start. About three paragraphs in. I know – we've

been through so much since then. But I still respect you, even after the, the err... unpleasantness), there's always something going on.



Another bogey bites the cosmos.

Even if it is the same something over and over again. *Freelancer* doesn't create a realistic universe for you to live in, but it does create a playable one. You never fool yourself into forgetting that it's all just a game, and the majority of the time you'll be approaching the various challenges thrown at you with a gamer's eye, looking for ways to beat the game design rather than developing exciting tactics to defeat blood-thirsty space pirates. But that's no bad thing when you consider how bad *Freelancer* could have been, considering its history.

Even so, for a great many of you, the limitations and repetitiveness will probably be too much to get past. Which is fine. Try the demo which we'll have on next month's coverdiscs and see for yourself. If you don't think it goes far enough, then hold fast as *Freelancer* will more than likely be completely overshadowed when the truly epic-looking *X2: The Threat* finally arrives

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)

STRETCH YOUR LEGS

Obvious really. We want to walk about on the planets and space stations we dock at. How hard can it be to implement some kind of basic FPS engine into an already 3D universe? *Frontier: Elite II* pulled it off years ago and even Derek Smart managed a crude form in the *Battlecruiser* series.

More immediately, though, Digital Anvil should really get to work on a sequel that provides far more variety, and takes far less time to produce. Rather than just visual differences, make each area of space feel different. Add cultural differences between the races. Let them do it – Microsoft, it'll be worth it in the long run.



More freedom and diversity is what's needed.

later this year. Then you'll have all the dynamic economic systems, alien worlds and realistic universes you can contend with.

Those of you that do decide to give it a go will find a game that refines the existing space sim genre rather than radically reshaping it. It has the arcade immediacy of *Wing Commander* with a touch of *Elite*'s sprawling open-endedness bolted on the front for added scope. But while it captures the mechanics of both games perfectly well, what it doesn't manage to do is capture the spirit behind these classic titles.

But providing you don't mind playing a game rather than a simulation, you're going

to enjoy *Freelancer* simply for what it is – a harmless slice of action-packed entertainment. Which, after all, in this day and age we simply don't see enough of. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Immersing atmosphere
- ✓ Simple, but effective interface
- ✓ Very well told story bits
- ✓ Great combat
- ✗ Very repetitive in the long-term
- ✗ Story is way too short

84

Not perfect, but good enough



Some of the large ships are simply immense.



Not quite sure what that means but it sounds nasty.

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

■ £29.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Black Cactus | ETA: Out Now | www.blackcactus.com

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

After a century of peace, war blights the land once more. Martin Korda wades into this mythical 3D RTS spin-off to give everyone a good kicking



The annual yacht race ended in controversy as the crowd tried to kill the competitors.

"BRING FORTH the Gibbering Horde!" bleated freelance writer Steve O'Hagan for the 23rd time that minute. I looked over at him, shoulders hunched over his keyboard, tongue sticking slightly out of the corner of his mouth, a delicate thread of drool hanging from his lip like a spider's web.

A thin smile crossed his lips as he watched the massed ranks of troops on screen clash in a frenzy of steel and wood, before

gleefully squealing, "My Gibbering Horde are vanquishing the enemy!" in the manner of a five-year-old girl who's just beaten her over-competitive dad at tiddlywinks for the first time.

And then it happened. Distant at first, but rhythmical and menacing, sending shivers through the puddles of sweat and the collection of beer cans that had amassed during our four hour multiplayer session of *Warrior Kings: Battles*, the skirmish-based follow up to last year's stunning 3D RTS, *Warrior Kings*. We watched transfixed as a hideous behemoth emerged from the fog. Anne Widdecombe! No, wait. It stepped into the light, revealing itself fully: Abaddon, a 20-foot demon of immeasurable might, heading straight for Steve O's village. The Gibbering Horde gibbered. Peasants screamed. And Steve

all of a sudden didn't look so smug anymore...

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

Warrior Kings: Battles is full of moments like these. It's the kind of game that never fails to surprise you, throwing up some new challenge or nuance just when you think you've mastered it. Like when an enemy spy slinks into your base and sets your farms on fire (the bastard), or when a legion of your most experienced horsemen get turned against one another by an enemy Succubus (the bitch). Y'see, *Warrior Kings: Battles* is a rare breed in the world of the RTS, in that it actually requires you to think, play and act strategically at all times, instead of just



This isn't going to take long.



Your troops gain experience by practising on training dummies.

mindlessly building up a force and overwhelming the enemy's base with sheer weight of numbers. Its superb 3D engine throws out beautiful landscapes all over your monitor, like an artist crafting on a canvas. And just like the *Total War* series – and unlike pretty much every other recent RTS – the way the units' strengths and weaknesses interact with the landscapes are fully tactical.

Stick an archer on a hill and he'll beat one who is lower down. Flank a group of enemies with a wedged-shaped cavalry rush and you'll have enough

meat to open a chain of kebab shops within seconds. Conversely, use the wrong set of units to attack the opposing ranks and it'll be you who watches as your men are packed into pittas by an angry Turk.

KEEP THE PEACE

WKB is set 100 years after the exploits of Artos in the original *Warrior Kings*. Having united the world in that game, you find yourself once more in a fragmented continent of feuding warlords. But whereas *Warrior Kings* was a story-driven RTS where both your strategic and

INPERSPECTIVE

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue: 120, Score 90%

Quite simply the best strategy game ever made. If fully tactical 3D terrain and huge battles are your thing, you can't afford to miss this classic.

WARCRAFT III:

REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed Issue: 119, Score 85%

Has all the polish *WKB* lacks, four varied races to play as, and the most compelling story ever seen in an RTS. However, the build 'n' rush gameplay is overly simplistic and quickly becomes repetitive.

"We watched transfixed as a hideous behemoth emerged from the fog"



Watch towers are essential for base defences.



The mighty Fomorians unleash their loads.

moral decisions dictated your route (both literally and technologically), *WKB* is somewhat more straightforward, and sadly far less varied and compelling as a result. Starting with just one province, you must work your way through to the domain of the evil Duke Ignis Hagens (a one-time ice cream salesman), to whom you have to give a damn good drubbing in order to restore unity to the world. Oh, and I lied about the ice cream bit. Sorry.

With each conquered province you gain tech levels and a higher population rate. At first, it seems pointless invading many of the surrounding provinces in the main campaign, when you can simply head straight for the capital a few provinces south of your starting point. But you'll soon realise this is far from easy, as you futilely send troops against superior AI generals who swat you aside like an insignificant insect, probing your defences from all sides until they slice you open like a beached fish, cutting off your supplies and watching as you squirm to your inevitable doom.

There are five tech trees in all; Pagan (evil magic wielders and hideous creatures who are great

in attack), Imperial (godly with and excellent defensively), Renaissance (masters of gunpowder), and then two hybrids of the three. The variety of units for each is massively diverse and imaginative, and there are several ingenious new units including Gold and Tree

Elementals (summonable from gold deposits and forests), Gibbering Horde (a mass of insane creatures) War Elephants (walking battering rams) and Spider Demons (breath that can melt a man's skull). But *WKB*'s greatest strength lies in a depth of strategic possibility that few other RTSs can match.

TWISTS IN THE TALE

Sadly, though, there are several problems to contend with too. The dodgy individual unit AI from the last game again shows its head here – although not nearly as regularly – with some enemies standing around gormlessly as your archers turn them into walking pincushions, while path-finding is more of a mixed bag than a sack full of pick 'n' mix. The interface also needs an overhaul, with troop management overly fiddly in the midst of larger battles (which can consist of several hundred



The ungodly Abaddon, about to take a hell of a beating.

SEE YOU IN VALHALLA

FORGET ABOUT BUILDING FARMS, THIS IS WHERE THE ACTION'S AT

Black Cactus has added a feature very similar to the one I've been screaming out for, for well over a year now. Thanks to the excellent engine, and the tactical nature of the units and terrain, the Cacti have come up with a Valhalla mode, where you assign yourself and your opponent(s) armies, and then clash head on. Things are made even more tactical by strategic points on the map, which need to be captured and held in order to clock-up your score. The first team to collect the predetermined amount of points wins.

Battles can be huge, with more than 1,000 units clashing in a bloody mesh of flesh, steel and uncontrollable bodily excretions. But while the action is entertaining, this mode highlights the weaknesses of the combat interface, which is slightly too clumsy for battles this large. Perhaps unit-management is something this highly talented, up-and-coming development team will sort out for their next project, *Crusaders: Battle for Outremer*, a game we're already getting more than a little excited about.



Valhalla mode is fast and furious.

troops), and worker units getting lost behind buildings and trees. Other basic oversights include not being able to use hotkeys to jump to groups of units, or to cycle through idle peasants to see where they all are. What's more, the absence of a storyline and cut-scenes means it lacks the polish of some of its less strategically intense

counterparts (such as *Warcraft III*), while the lack of mission variety palls slightly towards the end of the campaign.

These problems aside, though, *Warrior Kings: Battles* is one of the most compelling, strategically diverse and entertaining strategy games of the year, a must-have for anyone sick of the tedium provided by the droves of virtually strategy-free RTS games currently on the market. What's more, the multiplayer battles are such good fun you'll be hard-pressed to find a more entertaining group activity this side of Amsterdam. And you can't argue with that. Well, you can, but that would just be childish. [A-]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent engine
- ✓ Challenging AI generals
- ✓ Five varied tech-trees
- ✓ Superb selection of units
- ✗ Some poor individual unit AI
- ✗ Lack of mission objectives

85

The game which puts the 'S' back into RTS



"Hmm?
Seatbelts? You
must be joking."



Arnie's had his motor upgraded I see.



Expect plenty of explosions.

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

■ £29.99 | Pub: NovaLogic | Dev: NovaLogic | ETA: March 28 | www.novalogic.com

REQUIRES PIII 733MHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D Card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D Card

He may not be Chuck Norris but *Paul Presley* certainly knows when a special ops mission needs to be aborted

THEY SAY those who fail to heed history are doomed to repeat it. As you read these words it's entirely likely that Gulf War II: Baghdad Or Bust! is well under way. Hmm.

Vietnam. Cambodia. Korea. Panama. Nicaragua. Iran. Libya. Cuba. Let's be honest, the US military might hardly has the most sterling form when playing away from home. Hence, one supposes, its willingness to go

after an identifiably easy target such as Iraq rather than try it on with an opponent of significantly greater threat to global stability like, ooh I don't know, North Korea, perhaps, or Israel?

One of the most recent away defeats for the US was during the early '90s in Somalia, Eastern Africa. The infamous

it's very poorly built. Every level is just a long session of trial and error, the longer the mission, the bigger the trial, the more numerous the errors.

Progressing through each mission is a painstaking process, with the emphasis on pain. Rather than create any realistic sense of conflict, you just have a

these are all found to be just as lacking. You might as well be on your own for all the help your squad mates provide, either at following your (limited choice of) orders or actually aiming at anything more than four foot away. As for the enemy, 'cannon fodder' doesn't even come close.

What gets me is that you have games like *Operation Flashpoint* or *Ghost Recon* which prove that you can do intelligent squad AI, that you can make realistic feeling environments, that you can create a true sense of the dangers of being in combat situations, but we still end up with something as shoddily put together as *Black Hawk Down*. Even having been developed several years after those previous titles and with the full awareness of what's possible.

"Black Hawk Down feels as though it deliberately set out to avoid being any good"

INPERSPECTIVE

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Reviewed Issue 125, Score 93%
Still the best and now with more expansions, add-ons and mods than you could ask for. Including a *Black Hawk Down* set.

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM

Reviewed Issue 121, Score 73%
Another real-world US conflict recreated for gaming pleasure. Better than *BHD*, with a stronger sense of teamwork.

Black Hawk Down affair has been chronicled in both novel and film forms, and now here, for good or ill, is the computer game form from lightweight military specialists, NovaLogic.

MOGADISHU, BLESS YOU

I won't bore you with too many details (I'd be here forever) but the bottom line is that this is not a very good game. For all sorts of reasons. Most glaringly of all,

thinly-disguised shooter on rails, with enemies fixed in position, often with no way of knowing they're there until they've shot you first. Load, shoot, move, save, die. Repeat to fade.

Every FPS cliché in the book is in *Black Hawk Down*. Which wouldn't be so bad if they were backed up by some sort of innovation in areas such as AI programming, level design or environment building. Instead,

The missions are varied enough, certainly. And to be sure, there is a fair amount of entertainment to be had from riding on the side of a helicopter as it swoops in over a target zone crawling with enemies. But manning the guns on these 'rides' (choppers and Hummvees mostly) provide the few truly bright spots in an oasis of tedium.

UNNOVATIONS

We're supposed to be constantly innovating in this industry, always improving, getting better and better with every new day. That's the nature of the business, yet *Black Hawk Down* feels as though it deliberately set out to avoid being any good. As though it looked at what the competition was capable of and actually



thought, "Yeah, but we don't want to be like them. They're decent."

DISHONOURABLE DISCHARGES

There's something more insidious at the heart of *Black Hawk Down* than just the bad design (and if you think that political discussions have no place in a game review then you might as well skip forward to the next bit). The manual makes a big play at the start about honouring the fallen soldiers of the Somali conflict and how as we play we should "reflect on their sacrifices".

Which I'm all in favour of, except that this game honours the memory of fallen soldiers about as much as an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie. All I know is that if I had given my life for the service of my country I would want to be represented by something that tells of the true cost of a war. That describes the dangers, the horrors, the courage, the fear and the terrible cost to all sides of a conflict. All *Black Hawk Down* honours is the US Army's public relations department.

BRAIN CANDY

This is war as produced by Jerry 'Top Gun, Pearl Harbour' Bruckheimer. Explosions, gunfire, lots of earnest shouting and the false sense of authority



If at first you don't succeed...

that comes with reciting military terminology in an American accent. It gives no sense of what the men of Task Force Ranger really endured, instead portraying the events as a gung-ho thrill ride that turned out all right in the end. You even get a 'bonus' mission at the end set three years after the conflict ended. In real life the opposing commander, General Aidid, was killed in clan fighting in 1996. Here the story supposedly goes that you, as a black ops specialist, were sent in to take him out covertly, thus trivialising whatever small sense of respect the developers had previously tried to muster in the preceding game by coating it all in further sub-Hollywood action movie style

plotting. The moral: the good guys (America) always win.

Anyway, back to the gameplay mechanics. NovaLogic has turned the science of developing brain-dead action shooters that masquerade as realistic military simulations into an art form. Playing this and just about any of their output recently gives the impression that every project leader in the office is a 15-year-old thrash metal dude

"It gives no sense of what the men of Task Force Ranger really endured"

ROLL OUT THE BARREL

CLICHÉ AFTER CLICHÉ AFTER CLICHÉ...

Ah, the good old exploding barrel. The staple ingredient of EVERY FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER EVER. Somalia is apparently littered with them. Big old barrels of explosion juice that ignite on contact with a single bullet. Except that here they're also accompanied by exploding wooden crates and, I kid you not, exploding market stalls. Apparently everything in Somalia is built from the most combustible substances known to man. No wonder all the civilians in the game just seem to run around waving their arms in terror.

Luckily there are plenty of magic health packs lying around every corner though, just in case anyone should get hurt from the several thousand explosions that must happen every day in Mogadishu whenever someone sneezes too hard.



Gaming's own weapon of mass destruction.



The ballet training was paying off.



The helicopter missions are fairly entertaining.

who survives solely on a diet of Chuck Norris films.

Their recent titles have come pre-packed with an air of pointlessness that leaves you wondering why on Earth you're

bothering with it in the first place. *BHD* is no different. It's all just sound and fury signifying nothing. As each level blurred into the next it was all I could do to remember what had just gone

before. At no point do you feel any sense of emotional involvement in what's happening which, given the subject matter, is all the more chafing.

AND FINALLY...

One more thing. Other than the shoddy levels of craftsmanship, the questionable politics and the sweeping sense of nothingness prevalent throughout, there's one other reason why *Black Hawk Down* fails to impress. It only took me the weekend to complete. From basic training through to the closing credits. Two days. Not exactly the hardest game. Just frustrating. On so many levels. Let's hope it fairs better in multiplayer, which we'll be reviewing over the next month or two. **[C-]**

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

BLURRY NIGHT VISION - IT'S THE WAY FORWARD

I guess I should say something nice about *Black Hawk Down*, just by way of balance. Well visually, of course, it's none too shabby. But then thanks to GeForce 3/4/MXs and D3D and all that, everything looks nice these days.

Still there are some nice flourishes in *BHD*. Night Vision in particular is well represented, with a sort of heat-sensitive green illumination type jobbie that blurs whenever you move your head, just as in real life. Since there are very few occasions when a mission takes place in total darkness, judging when is best to use the thing is tricky, as it can often hinder your view as much as improve it.



There you go, something good.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks nice enough
- ✓ Good helicopter and vehicle bits
- ✓ Varied missions
- ✗ A chore to play
- ✗ Lack of thought throughout
- ✗ Too easy to complete

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A major casualty of war

Heroes wanted



Audition now



Challenge Everything™

uk.ea.com

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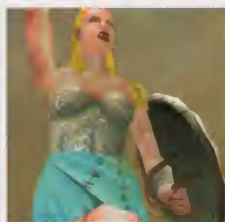
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"For more enjoyable Highland entertainment try sucking porridge through a set of bag pipes"



Just one of 80 immaculately presented cut-scenes. Ahem.



There are a total of five resources to collect. Which is too many.

HIGHLAND WARRIORS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Novalogic | Dev: Data Becker
ETA: Out Now | www.highlandwarriors.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.3Ghz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb GeForce 3

We made Keith Pullin drink a keg of single malt before playing this. It was for his own good

WHEN YOU look at the actual concept of *Highland Warriors*, there's not much wrong with it. Let's face it, what Scotsman wouldn't want to step into the shoes of legendary warriors like William Wallace and Robert The Bruce and give the English a good kicking? But what looks promising on paper translates into a bit of a disaster in practice.

Despite the appeal of the subject matter, this

RTS suffers from so many problems we're going to be hard-pushed to cover them all. Still, we'll do our best...

A BIT OF MAKE-UP

Graphically, *Highland Warriors* is about two years behind current technology. The landscapes are blocky with poor textures, the buildings are drab, and the walking animation for infantry and peasants is abysmal. If you

can imagine a mime artist torn between trying to moonwalk and ice skate then you'll have a fairly accurate idea of what to expect.

This indecision also manages to filter into the unit AI. For some reason units are extremely slow to respond to commands – if they respond at all. The reality is that they're more likely to do whatever they want.

For example, during a town assault your army can be merrily ripping the English to pieces when suddenly your entire force will turn around, run out of the gate, and chase down a lone peasant who happened to return home at the wrong time. Alternatively, your rowdy bunch of Scots will march into town and just mill

around grunting and looking aggressive – not unlike a Saturday night in Glasgow.



They may look like tough bastards, but they're easily distracted.



Graphically, this is about as good as it gets.

All this is infuriating, but what's probably more disappointing is the way *HW* blatantly rips off *Age Of Mythology*'s entire resource management system. The only difference being that there are five resources instead of four, meaning you spend more time than ever tinkering with your economy. Frankly, it's the last thing you need when seeking respite from the random behaviour of the axe-wielding maniacs on your front line.

A SHORT TIME AGO

The irony is that if, through some miracle, your troops actually do what you ask, then disposing of the enemy is surprisingly easy. In fact, all four game campaigns can be completed in less than two days on the hardest of the three difficulty settings. Now, it doesn't take a Scotsman to realise that shelling out 30 quid for something with a life-span of 48 hours is obscenely poor value

for money. Obviously there's multiplayer, but if you can find someone to play against, then good luck to you.

Ultimately, *Highland Warriors* looks bad, plays bad and, well, is just plain bad. For more enduring and enjoyable Highland entertainment, try sucking up porridge through a set of bagpipes instead. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Four campaigns
- ✓ Some nice weather effects
- ✗ Dodgy graphics
- ✗ Atrocious AI
- ✗ Too much resource and economy management
- ✗ Too easy

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Less tasty than a deep-fried battered Mars bar

INPERSPECTIVE

BRAVEHEART

Reviewed Issue 79, Score: 83%

By no means a classic take on Scottish history, but it's got enough gameplay and original ideas going for it to make it a better buy than *Highland Warriors*.

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Reviewed issue 128, Score: 84%

If you want to lead little men with big axes to glory in rocky, evocative surroundings, then this is probably the RTS for you.



Leaders wanted



Enrol now



Challenge Everything

uk.ea.com



The attention to detail is astonishing.

Rear Gunner: Autopilot Off
Rear Gunner: Autopilot On
Pilot: Autopilot Off

"I'm outta here."



Intense dog fighting at its best.

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: 1C: Maddox Games | ETA: March 14 | www.il2sturmovik.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** 1.8GHz, 512Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

The finest flight sim of all time? Comrade **Paul Presley** writes the people's review

SEVERAL years ago a vicious argument raged throughout the flight-sim community when then-leading developer DID released *F-22 Total Air War* – a full price 'revamped' version of its hit *F-22 ADF*. The problem was that the only ostensible difference between the two was the addition of a dynamic campaign engine. Was it a new game? Add-on masquerading as sequel? Con job? The jury was so far out it was wearing crushed velvet flares and platform boots so high they caused vertigo.

INPERSPECTIVE

IL-2 STURMOVIK

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 90%

Just as beautiful but *IL-2:FB* is just that bit better. However this is cheaper in case you're on a tight budget.

FIGHTER ACE 3.5

Reviewed Issue 127, Score 85%

More WWII flying goodness but this time in a dedicated, persistent online world style. Proper Bo.

Ubi soft has done the same thing with *IL-2 Sturmovik's* 'sequel' *Forgotten Battles*, only this time round it isn't so blatant. Most of what's been improved lies under the bonnet – less buggy AI, more accurate flight models, and a somewhat more realistic experience. Example:

"IL-2 thrills, excites, concerns, worries, stresses, exhilarates and enriches you"

anti-aircraft guns aren't nearly as accurate as they were before, meaning bombing runs are still a nerve-shatteringly dramatic affair, with tracer shells zipping and popping all around your cockpit. Only this time round your chances of actually getting anywhere near your target without resembling a perforated teabag lie on the good side of 'wafer thin'.

OK, LOOK

You know what? It's pointless. All this detailed analysis, careful

breakdown of the game's components, meaningless critique of various shoddy areas and so on. None of it matters.

IL-2 Sturmovik shat on every other flight sim from a height so great, you'd need the aforementioned platform shoes to even come close. Reason

being? It was basically the work of one man. One man whose care, compassion and mastery of his craft shone through the game like a beacon of hope in a marketing-driven industry.

Forgotten Battles is this very same man's attempt to keep on doing things a bit better than the rest. He's listened to what the public had to say about his first effort, he's taken the time to make sure that what they wanted was actually worthwhile, and the result is there for all to see. Better AI, dynamic

campaigns, more planes – it's all in there.

BEST EVER

There is absolutely no point in criticising *Forgotten Battles*, (although less hardcore flight sim enthusiasts will no doubt be scared off by the magnitude of

detail) as demeaning this man's work serves no purpose other than to make the world even more miserable than it already is. These are the sorts of enterprises that we should be hailing loudly from the rooftops. Oleg Maddox (the man in question) should be granted as much money, vodka and women as he can stand for producing a game like this.

I could waste time telling you all about the things you can read about on the back of the box. Or I could just say this: *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is the finest



flight sim ever. It thrills, excites, worries, stresses, exhilarates and enriches you every time you play it. In short, you feel alive. How often do *FIFA Update 2003 All-Stars* or *Super Generic Platform Cash-In 56 Xtreme* do that? **PCZ**

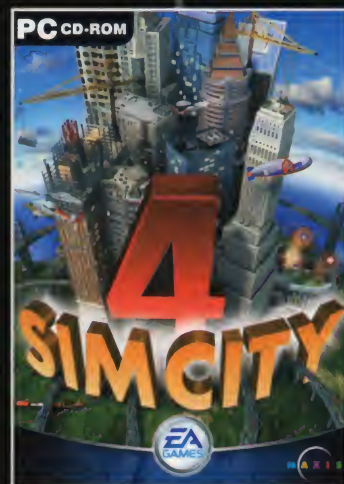
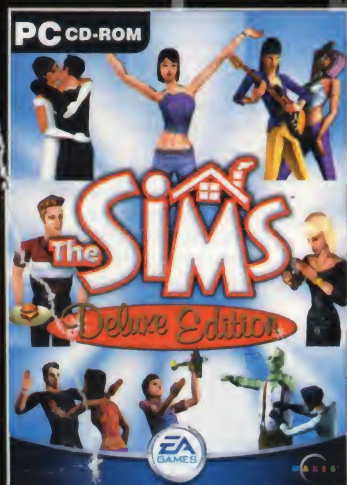
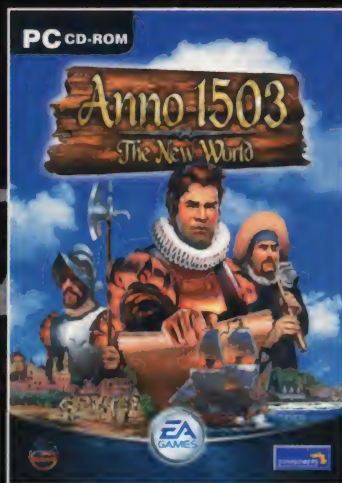
PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Amazing flight model
- ✓ Incredible AI
- ✓ Excellent dynamic campaigns
- ✓ Superb graphics
- ✗ Overly complex for some

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No flight sim is anywhere near as good

Visionaries wanted



Create now



Challenge Everything

uk.ea.com



Losing control of your car is a regular occurrence early on in the game.



Chewing the toffee.



TOCA RACE DRIVER

■ £34.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | ETA: March 28
www.codemasters.com/tocaracedriver

REQUIRES PIII 700 GHz, 128Mb RAM, and a 32Mb 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.6 GHz, 256Mb RAM, and a 64Mb 3D card

The TOCA series returns with a bang and a fully-fledged story. Steve Hill buffs his helmet

RONKONKOMA

Speedway, Michigan, 15 years ago. Two young boys watch their father burned to death in a tragic racing accident. Or was it? Cue the haunting melody of Lynyrd Skynyrd's epic *Sweet Home Alabama* (a scathing riposte to Neil Young's *Southern Man*, rock bores) and we're back in the present day at Brands Hatch where a young upstart driver is being courted by a *Sopranos*

style character called Paulie Satriali. Confused? You will be. Welcome to the world of the story-based driving game.

STORY TIME

For years, gamers have had no other reason to play a racing game other than the fact that they wanted to. The incentive to continue was provided by nothing more than a desire to drive fast and maybe win some

racers. Not any more. By introducing a narrative that unfolds as the game progresses, *TOCA Race Driver* has turned the genre on its head. Or has it? The alternative view is that Codemasters has done little more than throw in a few cut-scenes to pad out a series with nowhere else to go.

MCKANE AND DISABLED

Either way, to get back to that story, you take on the role of said young upstart Ryan McKane, whose brash attitude can be attributed to the mental trauma of watching his old man being flambéed in front of his eyes a decade and a half ago. Nevertheless, the experience hasn't put him off driving, and he is over here seeking to make his fortune in the world of Touring Cars. How well he does is, of course, up to you, and it can be embarrassing when the cut-scenes show McKane boasting of being the best driver in town,

only for you to career off at the first bend and crumple the expensive car entrusted to you.

And crumple it will, with the damage model among the best yet seen. Using the so-called Finite Element Modelling system, as used to model real-life crashes, the effect is often spectacular, with bonnets bending and doors flapping as you systematically destroy one of 42 real touring cars. Of course, the idea is to actually stay on the track, but as with

INPERSPECTIVE

TOTAL IMMERSION RACING
Reviewed Issue 124, Score 64%

A road-based racing game that braggod of intelligent opposition and personal grudges, but ultimately failed to deliver anything other than a fairly pedestrian experience.

TOCA 2

Reviewed Issue 76, Score 93%

It's a few years since this was cutting edge, but the driving model is largely the same, and at least your PC will be able to run it. No story though.



You are now entering the big cat sanctuary.



Cut-scenes drive the story between races.

"Cut someone up and they'll confront you with a volley of abuse at the end of the race, and quite possibly hold a grudge"



The level of detail on each car is impressive.

previous versions of *TOCA*, this isn't always possible and you do tend to spend a lot of time negotiating grass verges.

Hitting other cars is also sometimes unavoidable, and

the consequences extend to more than just messing up the paintwork. Cut someone up here and they will confront you after the race with a volley of abuse, and quite possibly hold a



Can you put the death of your father behind you and become champion? Well, can you?

grudge. All of which sounds very similar to *Total Immersion Racing*, a game that was released a few months ago to scant acclaim.

LET'S NOT

TOCA Race Driver is admittedly a far more polished game than *TIR*, but let's not pretend that it's anything other than just another *TOCA* game with knobs on. As such, it's a highly competent recreation of road racing with a

host of licensed cars and no less than 38 real-life race circuits. The story sequences are watchable enough, and while they don't necessarily add that much to the core gaming experience, they are professionally executed and do provide some mild entertainment between races.

While the graphics are highly detailed, they come at a price, and the game shouldn't really be entertained on anything less than a 1.6GHz machine. That fact alone will already make this review an irrelevance to a lot of readers. But if your system is up to it, and you still hanker fondly for the polished *TOCA* experience, this is your only real option. We know it was out on PS2 a while ago, but this version has been enhanced, offering 20 cars on the track simultaneously, for instance.

It's undoubtedly a comprehensive simulation of the sport, and the career mode does at least

force the issue of what car to drive and what track to race on. And once you get into it, there is scope for countless hours of play, albeit with no guns or explosions. But ultimately, for all its revolutionary pretence, it's just a good old-fashioned driving game. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent damage model
- ✓ Huge number of cars and tracks
- ✓ Passable story concept
- ✓ Some good tunes
- ✗ Very high system requirements
- ✗ Just another *TOCA* game

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TOCA 2 with knobs on

WALKTHROUGH →

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

A day in the life of a wannabe race driver



1 Here's self-appointed future champion Ryan McKane, sat around on his arse doing nothing. Make the lazy sod check his emails.



2 Hold up, what's this? An invitation to a test drive? This could be your big break. Accept it now, boy, if you know what's good for you.



3 Get down the track to meet and greet your potential employees. Endear yourself by telling them how great you are.



4 Take the test drive and tear round the track. Manage to negotiate it within a set time and they might be impressed.



5 Looks like this time your pre-race bravado was more than idle boasting. Congratulations, you've got the job. Start immediately.



6 "Welcome to Kwik-Fit. You'll find your overalls and a spare toolset in the lockers over there. Now get a brew on, you cocky little twat."





A still from the film? A screenshot from the game? You'd never know. Yeah, as if.

JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS

£24.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Blue Tongue
ETA: March 21 | www.bluetongue.com

REQUIRES PIII 400, 128Mb RAM, and a 16Mb 3D card

DESIRES PIII 1Ghz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Extracting the DNA or taking the piss? Keith Pullin digs around this dino management sim

WELL, IT had to happen. The only surprise is how long it's taken for the ultimate theme park movie to be converted into a *Theme Park* style game. And while *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis* was never going to possess the awe-inspiring thrill of the film, fans will be pleased to hear it still carries a reasonable bite.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

Caring for your dinosaurs is no easy task and there are plenty of factors to consider. You don't

have to be a paleontologist to succeed, but a degree of common sense helps.

First things first – food. Feeding modern ferns to a 200 million-year-old creature is a definite no-no. Watching your prize Stegosaurus slip into a coma because she's scoffed the wrong grass is not the prettiest of sights for the guests.

Getting the right blend of 'cell' mates is also crucial. Housing a bunch of hungry Velociraptors with a herd of small herbivores is not a good idea. True, the gathered crowds enjoy the bloody spectacle, but after a while, having to constantly replace your mangled grazers can seriously eat into your park's cash reserves.

Guests also want to see different types of beast. So, although it's tempting to cater for the thrill seekers by exhibiting nothing but ferocious carnivores, you also have to think about those who want more wondrous sights such as

the huge herbivorous Brachiosaurus devouring tree-tops, and the small but fun-loving Gallimimus flocking across the plains. To develop a truly magnificent park you need as wide a variety of dinosaurs as possible. Thankfully, with 25 different species from four Mesozoic periods to choose from, that's not a difficult proposition to fulfil.

AMBER NECTAR

One of the game's better features is the ability to send experts on fossil hunts to extract DNA from amber and bones to breed new dinosaurs. It's a novel concept and it adds to the whole *Jurassic Park* vibe. There are also 12 set missions that include oddities such as going on safari to take 'good quality' photos of dinosaurs. At least it makes a change from the usual drab holiday snaps.

Otherwise, the gameplay is what you would expect from a *RollerCoaster*

Tycoon/Theme Park clone; you charge for entry into the park, charge for standing on viewing platforms, charge for souvenirs, charge for burgers – you know the drill. The more money you have, the more fossils you can excavate (or buy at the fossil market) and the more dinosaurs you can proudly show off.

Overall, *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis* is a good representation of its genre and certainly highly enjoyable until you've hatched every dinosaur, cured every dino-disease and tackled every other challenge the game throws at you (such as typhoons, heatwaves and breakouts). But after that, like so many other games of this type you're left wondering, "OK, what now?" **PC**



A Velociraptor plays with an innocent Gallimimus. Aren't they just adorable?



A busy, prospering park. Just what the pay-masters want to see.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Dinosaurs – can't go wrong can you?
- ✓ Fossil hunting is a nice touch
- ✓ Velociraptors and T-Rex's can escape – yeah!
- ✗ Needs more variety in the rides and attractions
- ✗ Becomes repetitive pretty quickly

64

Not a massive evolution for the genre

INPERSPECTIVE

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON

Reviewed issue 123, Score: 80%

Still the best tycoon game around. Great range of missions and a huge variety of rides and attractions.

ZOO TYCOON: DINOSAUR DIGS

Reviewed issue 121, Score: 40%

As crap as *Zoo Tycoon* but with dinosaurs instead. What can you say? When it comes to dinosaur strategy *JP:OG* is definitely the best, but that's not saying much.



APRIL 17TH



It's the sort of game you could hole up with for a couple of years and just disappear.

ANNO 1503: THE NEW WORLD

■ £24.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Sunflowers/Maxx Design
ETA: March 28 | www.anno1503.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.5Ghz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Keith Pullin sets sail for distant shores, and gets conquering



INPERSPECTIVE

AMERICAN CONQUEST

Reviewed Issue 126, Score 71%

A more combat-based empire builder that requires a similar amount of time, but doesn't quite possess the charm of *Anno 1503*.

EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Reviewed Issue 121, Score 80%

On a par with *Anno 1503* in terms of trade options and the amount of goods you can produce. However, with its more polished interface this more exotic conquest 'em up just about edges it.

SPENDING ten days figuring out how an RTS/god game works is too long. Don't get me wrong, I'm prepared to give *Anno 1503: The New World* the time it demands, it's just that after devoting such a large chunk of my life to it, I at least deserve to be good at it.

EXAM TIME

As an intrepid European colonist of yore, creating a thriving empire in the face of competition from fierce local tribes and other land-grabbing would-be imperialists is the name of the game in *Anno 1503*.

But calling this a game is like saying *University* is a game. There'll be fun along the way, but if you're going to achieve anything you need to work for it. Extensive bedtime manual reading is required in the hope the process of jewellery trading, lamp oil production, and sheep farm efficiency will somehow clamp onto your subconscious.

But *Anno* overwhelms in other ways too. There are nasty interface foibles like buildings

disconnecting themselves from roads, and merchant ships taking ridiculously long routes to reach their trade destination. Deciphering land elevation is also tricky, and even running a road down a hill can be a nightmare.

Creating an army is no easier. Armouries, gunsmiths and other production facilities need to be built, which take time and resources. But as the other civilisations in the game tend not to attack unless attacked, amassing a deadly fighting force, is no guarantee of ever using it.

Yet, if you can overcome these problems, *Anno 1503* emerges as an extremely deep, thoughtful and addictive empire builder. That feeling of quiet satisfaction you get after constructing the perfect city, surrounded by little farms, breweries and mines, is something that only happens in particularly good examples of this genre.

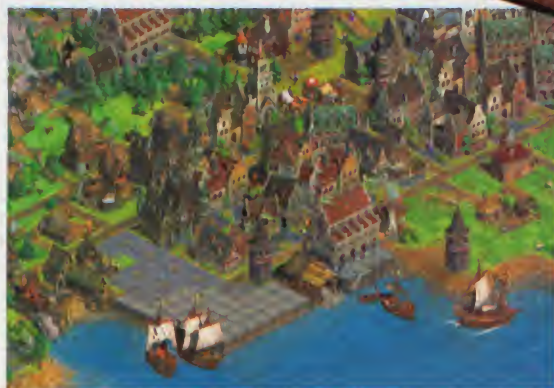
In fact, towards the end of my ten-day exile it became impossible to stop playing.



It's not really about combat, so ramparts are mostly for show.



Sea battles are disappointing, but rarely required.



Now that's a thriving city if ever we've seen one.

"That feeling of quiet satisfaction is something that only happens in particularly good examples of this genre"

New islands had been colonised, cigars and silk shirts were being manufactured, and new civilisations such as Eskimos and Moors had been discovered. My toil and hard work had even given my citizens the opportunity to use the public baths. With rewards and goals like this, what more could you want?

DEEP INSIDE

As the world around you begins to make sense, so your empire begins to flourish. At this point you realise games like *Zeus* and *Emperor: Rise Of The Middle Kingdom* have a competitor here. In fact, *Anno 1503* is probably the most complex and thoughtful of the lot.

If you're not particularly bothered about combat, and prepared to play at a very

ponderous pace, *Anno 1503* is up there with the best this genre has to offer and will provide a deep, immersive and enjoyable RTS/empire building experience for a very long time to come. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Masses of different goods to produce
- ✓ Very addictive
- ✓ Deep and involving
- ✗ Horribly overwhelming at first. And we mean *horribly*
- ✗ Very passive enemies

78

Deeper than the Atlantic

DEVASTATION™

RESISTANCE BREEDS REVOLUTION



"One of the most entertaining and attractive shooters of the next 12 months"

PCZONE Nov 2002

"Devastation could even give Soldier of Fortune II a run for its money..."

PCGAMER Aug 2002

"...brought lovingly to life by meticulous detail and generous smearings of virtual grime..."

PCZONE March 2003



NOVALOGIC®



www.DevastationGame.co.uk



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What can we say... hope there wasn't anything valuable in there.

POSTAL 2

■ £TBA | Pub: Whiptail Interactive | Dev: Running With Scissors
ETA: TBA | www.gopostal.com

REQUIRES Pill 733, 128Mb RAM, 8x CD-ROM and a 32Mb 3D card

DESIRES Pentium 4 2.4GHz, 384Mb RAM, and a 64Mb 3D card

Scott Steinberg says good #@Sing day to the most offensive game ever

MONDAY was a bad day. A riot ravaged Main Street, protestors died by the dozen and numerous onlookers found themselves urinated on more frequently than a lampost at Battersea Dog's Home. Tuesday, grenades blew pedestrians sky high, Gary Coleman killed a policeman and random vagrants became human torches. As for Wednesday, well... that's when things really got weird.

Hats off to *Postal 2* for being the balls-out, pants-down, most morally devoid product ever to disgrace the PC. The game is rude, crude, and so damn politically incorrect, you'll feel dirty just thinking about it. But it's also f***ing hilarious. Although, in fairness, we must admit a title that assumes all Middle Easterners are religious zealots and all priests enjoy toting machine guns might not be to everyone's taste.

Lesson one in how to get your first-person shooter-turned-adventure banned: completely eschew common sense. From minute one of a five-day adventure, assign players tasks like 'Get milk', 'Vote', or (our personal favourite) 'Piss on Dad'. Wandering around a living, breathing 3D world – specifically the town of Paradise, Arizona – you'll go about these obscure objectives, becoming enmeshed in random confrontations as you do. In fact, for a very short while you start to believe that *Postal 2* is – shock horror – fairly free-form.

THAT ISN'T IN THE SCRIPT

The brittle sense of freedom is soon dispelled by a collection of scripted sequences, which is just as well, as bumbling about the game-world would be a complete drag without them. And while bystanders do react with surprising intelligence when you pull a gun or riot stick, the setting never achieves the same level of realism or authenticity as *Grand Theft Auto III*'s universe.

Yes, planned encounters prove a godsend – they give the game its winning sense of personality. For example, a visit

to the Running With Scissors offices sees the development team join you for a shootout before screaming obscenities and kicking corpses. Then there's the brilliant book-burning sequence wherein protestors torch the Joseph McCarthy memorial library. And a visit to local beer brewing plant/pervert factory? Genius.

Biting though the humour is, much of it feels forced. As do



Gary Coleman – y'know, that little guy from *Different Strokes* – expresses displeasure over the current state of his career.



INPERSPECTIVE

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Issue 117, Score 95%

A much more lifelike world and colourful violence grace *GTAIII*'s immeasurably more attractive – and lengthy – rap sheet. The peak of free-roaming amoral action.

UNREAL II

Issue 126, Score 94%

For a slightly more serious solo shoot 'em up adventure, try the finest the galaxy has to offer.



In-game cut-scenes reveal random events as they happen.

objectives, which make you wander a hefty world map for no apparent reason. The situation's troubling, all the more so due to frequent and horrendous load times, since environments are carved into bite-sized chunks. Bummer. What's more, suspense levels are undermined because you can predict major encounters before they arrive. But the good news is such twists are usually so preposterous and/or obscene, in the end it generally doesn't matter.

FELINE BACK-BOTTOMS

Really, how could you not love a game gifted with such a massive and humorous range of possibilities? Thugs can shove shotguns up a cat's ass. Stoners can experiment with crack addiction. Sadists can attack homeless people with anthrax-ridden cow heads. And no, we're not making this up... considering the social taboos they're tackling, it's obvious the



Come here boy, that's it... THWACK!

development team has testes the size of cannonballs.

But, on a less promising note, what they lack is a sense of pacing. Large stretches of play are open-ended, demanding you backtrack incessantly. And while a fully-realised world is waiting, there's no impetus to go out and poke it with a sharp stick; seeking out trouble draws police attention, raising your wanted rating and the chances of bumping into trouble. It wouldn't be a problem if fast food, donuts

and other health-giving items were more readily available.

FOUL LANGUAGE

At times, you are encouraged to experiment. And some of the vocal prompts are hilarious. "Sign this petition or I'll follow you home and kill your f***in' dog," you tell a businessman. "Ooohhh... my nads," you scream when wounded. It's sixth-form stuff, but amusingly rendered by the audio-visual prowess of the *Unreal II* engine.



Something we've argued in favour of on many an occasion.

Yet despite lifelike character models, the backgrounds could have done with some work. Objects feel flat and artificial – some are so blurry you'll begin to feel you've been engaging in a little too much hand-to-gland combat recently. *Postal 2*'s creators have an eye for delivery, but they should work on timing, zest, and graphical aptitude – it'd make performances feel a little less serious.

Or maybe they feel that's your job – an unintentional side-effect

of handing players a working world editor. Can it be long before an America vs Iraq (or Aston Villa vs Birmingham City) scenario hits the Internet? We live in hope.

The bottom line is that this is a strong offering with obvious potential, though far from great. It will, however, go down in history as the most infamous PC game ever. And as to whether you'll find it amusing, well, that depends on if you find the following scenario funny:

Walking in on your grandparents humping. In leather masks. With carrots hanging out their arses. [E]

GOLDEN SHOWERS



Treat the lady to a Jimmy Riddle.



But watersports ain't her thing.

IT'S RAINING, IT'S POURING... URINE?!

In Paradise, Alabama, when a man's got to go, a man's got to go – regardless of who may be watching... or standing in the way. Observe an innocent female bystander idly minding her own business. Your first move, naturally, is a chat-up line, but "are those real?" doesn't appear to do the business. And as you're busting for a slash there's just one thing for it – whip it out and get hosing. Well, she had it coming. How dare she knock back your charming approach?

After a damn good drenching the virginal vixen appears a little queasy. You back up a few steps and then she hurls. Damn! And on your new pair of Nikes too. Just who does this chick think she is? Time to bust out that trusty old shovel and show her who's boss. Her missing head ought to teach her a lesson. Women, sigh... such fickle creatures, such delicate looking cadavers. And whoever said games are corrupting our youth?

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excessive violence
- ✓ Darkly satirical humour
- ✓ No censorship whatsoever
- ✗ Long load times
- ✗ Too scripted
- ✗ Many stretches of monotony

67

Fun, but a lawsuit waiting to happen

MASTER OF ORION III



A variety of leaders take on the tasks you can't be bothered with.

■ £29.99 | Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Quicksilver Software |
ETA: Out Now | www.infogrames.co.uk

REQUIRES PIII 300, 128Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 500 and a 16Mb 3D card

They can be deep and complex. Chris Anderson is neither but he knows a thing or two about space strategy games

LIFE IS full of annoying clichés, but however irritating the age-old adages passed down from one generation to the next may be, they often have a ring of truth. In this case 'Be careful what you ask for, you just might get it' will be ringing a few familiar bells to fans of the long-standing *Master Of Orion* turn-based space strategy series, of conquest and expansion.

They complained long and hard about the tedium and over-complexity of time-consuming micro-management, and developers Quicksilver nodded knowingly and responded accordingly with a brand new approach to managing the many and varied complexities of the

Orion series. Micro-management has all but disappeared and has been replaced by 'macro management'. But what does this mean exactly?

LOOK! A GAME THAT PLAYS ITSELF

While in theory it's a great idea to have mundane tasks taken care of in the background, in practice it doesn't work so well, as the AI very often gets things wrong and it's a pain to search for its mistakes and put them right yourself. This is not helped by the fact the game appears

overtly complex on the first few sittings, so trying to find your way round it and keeping an eye on the AI at the same time is not everyone's idea of fun.

There are other problems too. The research tree is huge and



The galaxy. Unsurprisingly, you'll spend a fair bit of time here.



Conduct diplomatic relations with things that look a bit 'odd'.

"The research tree is huge and you can easily lose track of what's going on later in the game"

you can easily lose track of what's going on later in the game. The real-time combat graphics appear to be somebody's idea of a joke (even when zoomed in it's hard to make out which ships are which because everything's so small), and the turn-based nature of the building and expansion parts of the game aren't too much prettier.

which adds an extra level of immersion.

In all, this third installment represents a step backwards for the series, but it somehow manages to remain playable and reasonably entertaining almost in spite of itself. **PC**

NOT ALL SPACE TRASH

There are moments of redemption however. The storyline is excellent and tells a tale of the fall of the Antarians and the rise of the New Orions (in which your part is fairly convincing), and the research technologies allow for very specific ship customisation. The in-game encyclopedia also plays its part in holding your interest, particularly by providing story background,



You'll manage all your planets from here.

INPERSPECTIVE

MASTER OF ORION II

Reviewed Issue 45, Score 92%

This is a much better choice if you like the space theme but prefer to do everything yourself, particularly since there is nothing to choose between the two in terms of presentation.

CIVILIZATION 3

Reviewed Issue 111, Score 86%

Civ remains king of the turn-based hill, and this third incarnation is as close to 'Civ perfection' as you are going to get.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Huge and varied research tree
- ✓ Comprehensive in-game encyclopedia
- ✓ Convincing storyline
- ✗ Very steep learning curve
- ✗ Woeful combat graphics
- ✗ Heavy-handed AI task automation

59

Relatively playable, but ugly and unremarkable



Zoom in and smell the smoke.



Each town is different and incredibly detailed.



Grape, shot and chain ammo are used in sea battles.



Navigate round the Caribbean, 16th century style.

PORT ROYALE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Big Ben Interactive | Dev: Ascaron | ETA: Out Now | www.ascaron.com

REQUIRES P III 450, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb video card DESIRES P III 900, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb video card

Give Andrew Wright an RTS involving a ship and a bottle of rum, and he'll be anyone's pirate for the night

IF YOU LIKE your sims to be involving and detailed, try this one for size. *Port Royale* is a simulation of life, warfare and adventure set in the Caribbean from the 1570s onwards. You take the role of sea farer merchant, or pirate – or any

combination of the three – and have thousands of miles of coastline to explore and exploit. There are more than 60 towns to visit, four nations (English, Dutch, French and Spanish) to contend with and, the ever-present threat of rum-soaked pirates.

It all begins with you harboured in port with a modest pot of gold and a small ship armed with a few cannons for self-defence. You can buy any combination of 19 different commodities and take them to another port to make a profit. You can also build various production facilities, from fishing huts to cocoa plantations, to satisfy ongoing local demand, or you can simply buy more cannons and start out on a career in buccaneering.

Capturing ships can be extremely lucrative and a quick way to build up a fleet. But your reputation plays an important part in the proceedings (especially later on), so it's vital to try and keep up appearances, especially in your hometown.

SELL! SELL! SELL!

You can build storage facilities in different ports and stockpile goods waiting for favourable market conditions. And if it all gets a bit overwhelming, you can create several different convoys

“Buy some cannons and start a career in buccaneering”

and give them automatic trade routes with stipulations on what maximum and minimum prices they should buy and sell at.

Occasionally town governors and other characters will offer you missions which vary from taking meat and potatoes to a starving town (usually on the other side of the map), to sinking a number of one particular nation's ships, or capturing a famous pirate. You'll also come across fragments of treasure maps, riddles and rumours.

Even at their lowest resolution, the graphics are solid, if a little samey, and the 3D sea battles can be quite complex,

with three different ammo types, adjustable sails and speeds, and the possibility of boarding other ships if you've an advantage in numbers. Up to ten ships a side can be involved, ranging from tiny sloops to frigates, caravels,

and men-o-war with a hundred or more cannons and several hundred crew.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Up to eight players can play in multiplayer mode, although the single-player game does rely heavily on your ability to pause the game or fast-forward the boring bits. Dozens of keyboard short-cuts are used to accelerate gameplay, and there is an excellent and indispensable tutorial which develops into a fully-fledged campaign once you've mastered the basics.

The manual is clear and concise, if lacking in hints, and

the game itself is fun, fascinating and moderately open-ended in style. But the fact that you have to progress through various ranks from humble seaboy to captain and governor in order to get bigger ships gives it a linear feel in places. And as the game goes on, the opposition just gets bigger and stronger. That said, once you've mastered it, you'll find that you'll be walking the planks of *Port Royale* for some weeks to come. **[A-]**

INPERSPECTIVE

CORSAIRS

Reviewed Issue 81, Score 59%

A little-improved remake of an old '80s favourite, Sid Meier's *Pirates*. Nowhere near as detailed as *Port Royale* but it's still good fun.

ANNO 1503: THE NEW WORLD

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 78%

If you prefer conquest and colonising, check out this solid new RTS on page 78.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Solid hi-res graphics
- ✓ Varied missions and strategies
- ✓ Huge game-world
- ✗ Not as open-ended as it claims
- ✗ No sound other than seagulls
- ✗ It's too easy to make mistakes

75

Addictive trade and sea battle sim

ALEX FERGUSON'S PLAYER MANAGER 2003

■ £24.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Anco Software
ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 600, 64Mb RAM and a 3D graphics card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D graphics card

In a change to our usual footy game reviewing policy, **Keith Pullin** comes off the bench as a late sub

FOR 20 years I've been playing football management games, and I can't remember ever playing one as poor as this. Firstly, the name is totally misleading. You can watch the match being played, but actually play in it? That doesn't happen. *Alex Ferguson's Player Manager 2003* is about management only – if you can call it managing.

Taking over at Portsmouth, I found Paul Merson constantly struggling for morale. At no point was I informed as to why the poor guy was so unhappy. Probably it was because the crowd had turned against him. After all, he had only scored six goals in his first three matches. And he wasn't alone. By the end of a fairly successful season in which Pompey reached the play-



These stats probably mean something to somebody.

offs, just about every player in the squad was a target for the boo boys. In fact, they were all placed on the transfer list halfway through the season by the board without me even

knowing. Quite simply, whatever you do, and no matter how carefully you manage your squad, you are never in control.

There are dozens of other reasons why you shouldn't buy



The unstoppable Todorov notches his twentieth of the season.



Merson is an attacking midfielder. Please sort it out Anco.

AFPM2003 but we'd need to bring out another issue to fit them all in. Anco may kick and scream and claim otherwise, but when it comes to footie management games, it has little to offer the genre these days. I won't insult your intelligence by telling you what a better football management option is, because

you already know. Yes, *Championship Manager* will be ousted one day, but not for a season or two yet.

PCZONE VERDICT 15
The worst footie management game ever



Abominable. And that's just the game.

Nice locations, nothing to do.

Not as good as flying monkeys.

GROM

■ £29.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Rebelmind
ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 350, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card
DESIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

A game name that turns up more results in search engines than expected, finds **James Lyon**

GROM IS a Polish refugee with a passing resemblance to Stalin, and it's him you guide through this thoroughly linear RPG telling of Nazis searching for god-like powers in Tibet.

There's no walking off the beaten path into sub-plot territory here, meaning there are few real decisions to be made and no extraneous detail to explore. This is RPG-lite, with no worry towards statistics. Even the infamous juggling of useless objects in your inventory is kept to a minimum. It's uncluttered, but also insubstantial. Not to mention bastard hard.

This is mainly due to the less-than-effective interface, which

works through a combination of pause-planning and real-time shooting. While it improves over time, this is more down to you having to lump it, rather than any sudden revelation of usefulness. Your character is astonishingly weak, too, and the self-serving AI of your team-mates doesn't help much in a tight spot either.

What this all boils down to is wandering around sparse villages, shooting a few people and reloading a lot of times. No hidden depth. A bit grom, really.

PCZONE VERDICT 49
A dull and thoroughly average RPG. Ho hum



There are some horrendous clipping issues.



Dirk hasn't changed a bit in all these years.



The detail in the environments is dismal.

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Dragon Stone Software | ETA: May 9

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card.

DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card.

Steve O'Hagan finds some fire in his belly for an action-adventure remake of a classic cartoon coin-op

DRAGON'S Lair caused a storm when it hit arcades way back in 1983 with its incredible cartoon-style visuals and kooky sense of humour. Boasting laser disc technology and art design from ex-Disney animator Don Bluth, the trouble was that it was

a shite game where you had practically no involvement in what happened.

As though there was some kind of public clamour for more of the same, here we are again with a 3D action/adventure revamping of this arcade oddity. As before, you are bungling knight Dirk the Daring, and once again it is your mission to rescue Princess Daphne from Singe the Dragon and his master, Mordroc the wizard.

To do this, you have to negotiate your way through castle rooms and dungeon vaults full of menacing beasts and devious pitfalls. There are platforms to jump, swinging blades to roll under, goblins to smite and items to use. Or at least that's probably something similar to what's written on the back of the box. In reality, your most challenging opponents here are the shatteringly bad controls and camera, the mind-numbingly monotonous combat

system, and the frustratingly random nature of the traps (Enter room. Die. Learn from mistake. Enter room. Don't die. Continue). OK, so the animations are nice, the music's decent and it's cheap, but it's a shocking game – make no mistake. And don't think just because you have fond memories of the ancient coin-op that this will be a pleasant trip down memory lane, as many of the original's hallmarks, such as the multiple death sequences, are nowhere to be seen.



PCZONE VERDICT **15**
Oh dear

HARBINGER

■ £19.99 | Pub: DreamCatcher Interactive | Dev: Silverback Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

DESIRES PIII 700, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Russell Fischer experiences diabolic deja-vu in space

WITH STILL no space-bound version of *Diablo* to mirror *StarCraft*, enter instead the dark and dreary *Harbinger*. Despite superficially cloning all aspects of Blizzard's game system,

Harbinger is missing the spark that made random dungeon hacking so essential and fun. Since *Harbinger* takes place on a slave ship big enough to swallow worlds, one would think that a

vast array of environments are to be found. Sadly not. Instead, prepare for endless, dull corridors. Granted, the 2D backgrounds boast some attractive – if homogenous – details and are complemented by an ominous score that gamely sets the tone. But it's far from enough to draw you in.

You play as one of three races (human, robotic gladiators



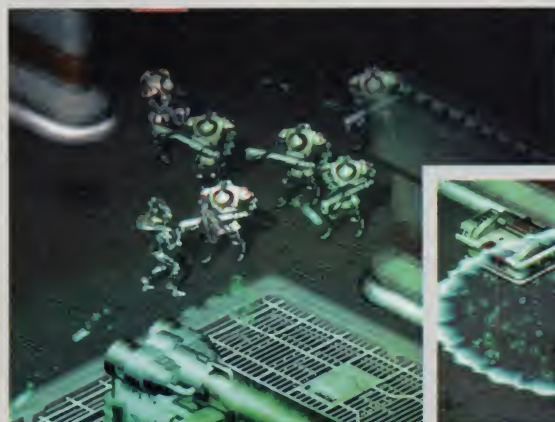
Needs a bit of sprucing up, this place.

and the bizarre Culibine), and the unfolding story differs for each race. But this three-pronged plot misses enough gripping narrative and strong gameplay to keep you interested. Combat relies too heavily on slow, ranged weapons, meaning success depends on disco-style projectile dodging rather than strategic skill, with little incentive to use the clunky, albeit powerful, melee weaponry.

Additionally, *Harbinger* fails in its emulation of *Diablo*'s vast stockpile of gubbins. Despite

boasting roughly 750 different items, the sense of a collector's glee is missing, partially because each race uses only a subset of the catalogue. There is a sort of 'map the dungeon' drive that could propel fans of the genre, but without a multiplayer option and a great deal more variation, even that is unlikely to last.

PCZONE VERDICT **50**
Overly drab, with a stunted combat model



Running usually solves this situation.



One of the more powerful melee attacks.

ENIGMA: RISING TIDE

■ £29.99 Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Tesseract Games | ETA: March 21

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4Ghz, 512Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Keith Pullin sits down and sinks a few battleships

ORIGINALLY designed as a massively multiplayer online 3D naval combat simulator, *Enigma: Rising Tide* proved so popular with those who saw it during its development that Tesseract Games decided to convert its code into a single-player game. And here it is...

Set in a continuously evolving offline world, *Enigma's* main campaign boasts 60 distinct missions – well, sort of.

If you know the difference between a destroyer, a torpedo boat, a corvette and a bunch of other tin buckets that bob around the ocean then yes, *Enigma* may well strike you as being an encyclopedic naval experience.

But if all WW2 ships look the same to you, then *Enigma* is nothing more than a fairly decent-looking arcade shooter where you relentlessly pound one ship after another until it sinks into the murky depths.

True, there's the added complication of having to shoot down aircraft, and there are five different vessels to sail (including a submarine), not to mention three sides to fight for.

In fairness, *Enigma's* accessibility cannot be doubted, and that's an appealing thought for those who have an inkling for naval combat but couldn't necessarily reel off the tonnage of a Flower Class corvette.

Sadly though, *Enigma's* shallowness and lack of true theatre of war tactical gameplay means its limited charm is unlikely to sustain anyone's interest for more than a few days. By all means try it if you're after some novel naval nihilism, but be prepared for a short campaign.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

59

Shallow waters



The end of another pleasant cruise.



Wait 'til you see the whites of their eyes...



"What was that you said about not being in range?"

CASINO INC

■ £29.99 | Dev: Hothouse Creations | Pub: Konami | ETA: March 21

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4Ghz, 512Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Mark Hill gets his head crushed in a vice. That'll teach him to gamble with someone else's money

KONAMI, with franchises such as *Pro Evolution Soccer*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Silent Hill*, is one of the biggest names in the videogaming world. So it seems odd that it should choose the battered sim/tycoon genre to make its first foray into PC-exclusive ground. And it's even odder that Konami has chosen the developer of *Gangsters* to do the foraying for it.

Casino Inc unashamedly steals, begs and borrows from the likes of *Theme Park* and *Theme Hospital*, but ends up more like the lesser examples of the genre: *Airport Inc*, *Pizza Tycoon* and a dozen other hangers-on. The idea must have sounded good enough in the endless board meetings. After all, if Eidos could get away with setting its theme game in an 18-30 holiday resort, basing one on a gambling empire had to be a sure bet. Ba-boom.

Despite Hothouse's attempts to style its casino management in the mode of Martin Scorsese

(minus Joe Pesci's vice antics), there is very little substance here, and very little we haven't seen before. There's lots of depth and detail, and a host of options to tweak. Perhaps even too much, as just completing the tutorials is enough to give you a thumping headache.

There's plenty of fun stuff like hiring bouncers and hitmen, and sending the cheats and thieves you catch to mess up your opponents' casinos. But this

doesn't make up for the dull core of the gameplay. The ugly cartoon style, poor attempts at humour and an interface from hell hardly help to redress the balance either. Still, it's not the worst of its kind we've seen. And that's got to be worth something.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

60

The gaming equivalent of a bucket of quarters



Your doormen can be instructed to keep these fatsos out.



You can beat up old ladies caught cheating. Try it, it's fun.



You can set up cinemas, discos and bowling alleys too.

Build a peaceful empire.



Or build an empire with blood



It's 1503 AD. The empire you live in depends on what you build. Will it be a fleet of ships for prosperous trading relationships? Or an armada of warships for attacking your neighbours? Live in peace or face a watery grave. Either way, it's you who will decide.



Anno 1503 The New World



It's your world. It's your choice.

www.anno1503.com



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DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: SHROUDED ISLES

ONLINE ONLY

REQUIRES
ORIGINAL
DARK AGE
OF CAMELOT

■ £16.99 (£6 per month subscription) | Pub: Wanadoo
Dev: Mythic | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P4 1.4Ghz, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES** That'll do, but with an ADSL connection

Like a moth to a flame, Daniel Emery goes back to the MMORPG he once loved. Not in the biblical sense of course. That would just be wrong

WHEN *DARK Age of Camelot* was released, it triggered a flood of players to jump ship from *EverQuest* in search of the 'perfect' MMORPG. The flood became a trickle and then, like an orgasm in reverse, everyone went back. Well, nearly everyone.

For some, *DAOC's* lure of better graphics, some great player vs player (PvP) combat, nice quests and abundant though repetitive dungeon-based combat was a winner. But 18 months on and things started to get stale. Enter Mythic's new add-on pack, *Shrouded Isle*.

The most obvious change is the graphics. They've been given a serious going over, although they're still not up to *Asheron's Call 2's* standards. Other options, such as mip-mapping, – making both the terrain appear less artificial and upping the frame rate – have also been tweaked. Although the visual improvements are nice, it's the frame rate that makes a real difference – some large scale PvP raids got so bad in terms of graphical lag, that players would log off in disgust.

Also added are a new race and two new classes (a warrior and a pet-handling class) and the new dungeon areas make high-level raids enjoyable again.

So for current *DAOC* players, this £17 add-on is almost verging on the essential. But for the rest of you, is it really worth



"It's my stag knight." You're not funny.

£30 (for the original and this) with £6 every month on top for the full thing? Well, possibly not as there's much better out there.

Graphically *DAOC's* outclassed by *Asheron's Call 2*, community-wise *EverQuest* is still the daddy, and once *Star Wars: Galaxies* goes live, you can kiss every other MMORPG goodbye. Stiff competition.

PCZONE VERDICT **78**
Nice, but not nice enough



The 2003 hula hoop champion shows his crazy skills.

NASCAR RACING 2003

■ £29.99 | Pub: Sierra | Dev: Papyrus | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 450GHz, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

DESIRES PIII 500GHz, 64Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Phil Wand slips a helmet onto his head and matchsticks under his eyelids



Hello, boss? I think I may in a bit late.



Round and round and round we go.



Spinning is all too easy and very frustrating to boot.

NASCAR Racing 2003 has all the licenses, all the tracks and all the drivers from the US event, but you can't disguise the fact that for £30 you could buy four metres of Scalextric track and have twice the fun.

If driving round in circles wasn't boring enough, the game presents the same boxy graphics seen in previous versions. Even with every detail switched on and the draw distance at maximum, you'd be forgiven for thinking you were looking at last year's software. Although a squint at the tarmac reveals some nice bump mapping effects, it all still looks

cold, razor-edged and just plain uninteresting.

Gameplay is largely unchanged, with Tutorial, Quick Race and Championship modes on offer, although the artificial intelligence – now adjusted automatically throughout the races – has improved markedly. Cars are meant to deform in accidents, but we found no evidence – crash into a wall, and the bonnet remains on its hinges. Turn around and head the other way ("You've been disqualified for dangerous driving!") and opponents brush you aside as though they're hewn from concrete girders.

In its favour, the engine noises are perhaps the best we've heard, the lovingly rendered cockpit features an array of fully working gauges, while the physics are real yet playable.

True to form, the Americans use the word 'International' a lot in describing NASCAR, just as they use 'World Series' to describe baseball, but the sad truth is that nobody outside the US is interested in either.

PCZONE VERDICT **55**
Dated racer with uninspiring gameplay

REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough

DEUS EX

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

IT'S POSSIBLY the best game ever made, and it's out for a fiver – what more could you need to know? Even if you never intend to play it you should have it on your shelf, like an unread *Complete Works Of Shakespeare*.

Deus Ex is a first-person hybrid that gives you free reign in developing your character, and lets you complete missions any way you want to. It's an RPG. It's a shooter. It's a stealth game. You can build up your computer skills and hack your way into buildings. You can improve your sniping skills and finish off enemies from afar. You can become a heavy weapons expert and wade in with flamethrowers and rocket launchers.

But what really makes it special is the way it presents a fully realised world, crammed with detail, and lets you loose to do what you want in it. There are set mission objectives (taking place in futuristic versions of locations such as Hong Kong, Paris and New York) but it

feels like you have complete freedom on how to do accomplish them. Killing certain characters changes the course of the story, but it never means you're lumped with a Game Over for doing something the programmers didn't want you to do. If only all games were like this.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

94



You won't find a better combination of stealth and action.



BEST BUY



The story is pure hokum, but you won't care.



IL-2 Sturmovik: quite possibly the best flight sim of all time.

IL-2 STURMOVIK

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: Out Now

IT'S BEEN called the best flight sim ever, it's won more awards than actually exist and it's got a fanbase of 17,000 million (approximately). But that means nothing until I've said whether it's any good.

Who am I trying to kid? *Sturmovik*'s one of those phenomenon thingies, and nothing I can say can spoil the party. I might suggest the only reason it's been hailed as the best flight sim in the past several years is because it's one of the only flight sims in the past several years, but I won't.

The bottom line is that it does everything right. It's a WWII-era sim, set on the Eastern Front (an area often ignored by the WWII gaming fraternity), it's one of the most atmospheric and gripping experiences you're likely to find in a simulated cockpit, and the developers' love for their product shows in every line of code and every pixel on the screen.

It might not have the polish of big-budget productions like *Falcon 4*, but you can go a long way on sheer enthusiasm and energy. All the way to Russia in fact.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT

90

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

■ £9.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | ETA: Out Now

THE FOURTH instalment in the obscenely successful series won't be making an appearance on the PC, but you shouldn't worry too much, as this is the best one anyway. Provided you have a good enough joystick to play it with.

Tony Hawk's is as involving a sports title (that doesn't involve balls) as you're ever going to play. With its tons of button combinations, it's all a little daunting at first, but it's so much fun you won't mind persevering until you can pull off just about any trick with your eyes closed. With its system of developing your skater's skills RPG-style and unlocking



Real skating is for kids. This isn't.

levels, it's rewarding enough to fall on the good side of frustrating.

Considering the difference in speed from, let's say, an F1 simulator, it's incredible how much more exhilarating pushing off on a skateboard can be. The fantastic level design and touches of humour help, as does the way this has been so faultlessly converted from the PS2 game. There's a superb level editor included, as well as an excellent soundtrack (including *The Ramones*, *Red Hot Chili Peppers* and *Motörhead*). So if you haven't already added to Tony's millionaire status, do it now.

Mark Hill



Pissing in the wind – futile.

PCZONE VERDICT

87



90 PCZ

EVOLVA

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

EVOLVA, an action game from Computer Artworks, the makers of *The Thing*, was brought out as a showcase for their experiences in organic art. They constructed an alien world, foregoing any industrial or metallic leanings for natural environments complemented by the curving surfaces of techno-organic weaponry. This unfamiliarity does help a



Organic art at its best.

little in stopping the game looking too dated, though prolonged play reveals the world to be a little too artificial.

In similar terms, what seems strange and unusual in the first few levels, soon becomes pedestrian as the veil of mystery is lifted to reveal the structure beneath: standard object retrieval/kill all enemies objectives dressed up in funny-looking

clothes. And while the landscapes may look otherworldly, the level layouts still conform to the standard practice of most action/adventures.

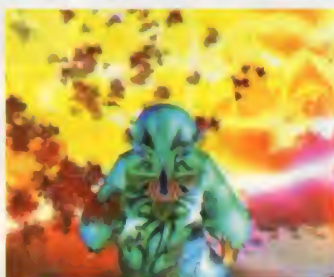
The whole practice of evolving your characters by absorbing the powers of new species isn't too bad an idea, but lacks much differentiation – you've either got the power or you haven't – and everything else goes into fine-tuning your energy consumption. A billion combinations of character, they said. A fancy way to get a few new weapons and extra ammo capacity, we said.

Evolva is worth a look purely for its graphical style, although it's not nearly as clever as it would have you believe.

James Lyon

PCZONE VERDICT

61



Interesting idea, standard gameplay.



Stop or my cigar-chomping six-handed dog will shoot.

MDK 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

DOES ANYONE really care what *MDK* stands for anymore? Thought not. Move on. This is the discerning critic's choice of third-person shooter, so they say. A hybrid of armoury and humour tied together in a rainbow package of inventive features and colourful characters.

Well, yes and no. Bioware does a grand job of updating Shiny's original: mainly with the parachuting, sniper-scoping antics of the weapon-headed Kurt. What they put into the other characters isn't quite as successful. The six-armed gung-ho dog is pleasant enough with his mindless shooting, but the doctor, on the other hand, frustrates with his inaccurate controls and lack of

involvement. Each level is interspersed with platforming and action puzzles, but only Kurt consistently shines through.

Still, it's a lot better this time round. The first time I reviewed this I mentioned how it's at least one-third brilliant and one-third pretty good. And seeing as how they're selling it off for less than a quarter of its full-price cost, that means it's, um...well, it's well deserving of some long-time loving. A shame the whole game wasn't based around Kurt, since you realise that getting to play as him makes tolerating the other characters a whole lot easier.

James Lyon

PCZONE VERDICT

78

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?

You want more? After that lot? Are you mad? Are you crazy? Well, OK then. But let me warn you now that after the virtual delights of gaming excellence we've had so far (with a couple of exceptions of course), you may be sorely disappointed by what follows here.

Carmageddon TDR 2000 (Sold Out, £4.99, out now), was the game which sold out the series. Bowing to moral pressure, you were no longer able to run over hapless pedestrians. No, no, no. Instead, and here's the killer (if you'll excuse the pun), you ran over zombies. Suddenly, everyone lost interest in the game, and it was exposed for what it really was. A sub-standard racer which relied on a controversial gimmick. With the gimmick gone, so was the game. And it's even more shit these days. 46 per cent.

How about *Descent 3* (Sold Out, £4.99, out now) then? Remember the *Descent* series? Back in the day, we were all stunned by its would-be 3D gameplay as you flew your little ship through some rather impressive looking inside and outside environments. Now it just looks a bit crap, plays somewhere a little below crap and can only be deemed valuable to pathetic nostalgics who refuse to move on from the past. 48 per cent.

Want a game which was a half-arsed attempt to rip off *Age of Empires* instead? Then try *Rival Realms* (Sold Out, £4.99, out now). Or rather, don't. 42 per cent. Or how about *Trickshot*, (Phoenix Games, £9.99, out now), a top-down, basic, but momentarily entertaining pool game? 55 per cent.

Finally, we have the *Arcade Collection* from Empire Interactive (£14.99, out now). Included are *Virtua Fighter 2* (pathetic beat 'em up), *Sonic 3D* (vaguely playable platformer), *Virtua Cop 2* (useless without a light gun), *Sonic R* (hedgehog racing), *Virtua Tennis* (excellent) and *Sega Rally Championship* (entertaining but limited racer). All in all, not a bad little collection. 79 per cent.

Martin Korda *Virtua Tennis*.



Carmageddon TDR 2000.



Descent 3.



Virtua Tennis.



You won't have any sleepless nights over this one.

COMANCHE 4

■ £9.99 | Pub: NovaLogic | ETA: Out Now

I DON'T have the exact figures to hand, but *Comanche 4* probably cost several million Yankee dollars to program, press onto shiny discs and send out to the world's retailers. And my message to NovaLogic is that you might as well have saved the money and spunked it on whores and pies.

I'm not saying that *Comanche 4* is a shoddy game. As arcade-based helicopter shooters go it's as fine an example of the genre as anything we've seen in a long, long time. Well-structured missions. Tension oozing from every pre-scripted moment. Music that fills your breast with pride, your eyes with tears and

your lower spleen with that strange pus that has your doctor so worried. No it's none of that which concerns. It's just the sheer, unequivocal pointlessness of it all that rankles so deeply.

Comanche 4 lasts for as long as you're playing it. That's all. You won't go to sleep dreaming of it. You won't be sat at the table formulating plans to get past tricky bits of each level. If a friend asks you what it's like, nine times out of ten you'll answer with the words, "Ehh, it's alright. I 'spose." Bubblegum gaming, pure and simple.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT

60

UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer evolution

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and omissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping. By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving, and because of this we'll be revisiting major releases to see what's changed over time.

This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review titles before they go on sale, often there are no public servers up and running, so instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play, we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.



A few of the maps are full of intricate and atmospheric details, but most are just flat and uninspired tile-based jobs.



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS v1.04

MULTIPLAYER

■ £34.99 | Pub: EA Pacific/Westwood | Dev: EA | ETA: Out Now | www.generals.ea.com | Players: 2-8

REQUIRES PIII, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

Can it be a decade since Westwood invented the RTS? **Richie Shoemaker** is feeling very old indeed



The in-game browser is awful. Thankfully a fix is on the way.

"It's as insanely fast as C&C of old, with games decided in a split-second of bad luck"

WORLD opinion is divided between those that think *C&C: Generals* is a self-righteous piece of US propaganda that plays upon abhorrent and xenophobic stereotypes, and those that think it's a harmless piece of interactive fiction that was released at an unfortunate time. Either way, most would clearly be mad not to agree that, in the graphics department at least, *Generals* is quite a

departure from the likes of vanilla *C&C* and *Red Alert*.

Seeing as this is a multiplayer review it would be wasteful to pick holes in the game's paper-thin storyline and decade-old AI, or to bemoan the loss of those wonderful FMV cut-scenes. Instead, let us examine the one aspect of Westwood's many strategy creations that has been of a constantly high quality – the online multiplayer game.

PROBLEMATIC

Unfortunately, finding your way into a game isn't an easy thing to accomplish. Two days after release and already the game had been patched twice, after which thousands have had problems connecting through the in-game interface, including yours truly. At the time of writing, the game is only a month old and EA is still patching the multiplayer game, and although it is getting more reliable to play online, games are frequently laggy, which apparently has to do with running the game in

800x600, which is quite frankly a ridiculous state of affairs and a criminal waste of a very impressive 3D engine.

THE FARCE AND THE FURIOUS

As accurately pointed out in last month's review, underneath the 3D-accelerated visuals the classic *C&C* gameplay is unchanged. The aim, as ever, is to collect resources, build an army and do as much research as you can – all as quickly as possible. It's as insanely fast and furious as *C&C* of old, with the outcome almost always decided during a split-second of bad luck or poor judgement, rather than a piece of inspired strategy. Games rarely last more than 20 minutes which is precisely why they are so popular and enjoyable.

The three sides couldn't be more finely balanced or distinct, both in terms of weaponry and tactics. One of the most inspired decisions the developers made was to introduce supplies as the

game's main resource, and have it collected by air, truck or on foot, depending on which side you choose to control. Brilliant. Arguably less brilliant is the 'Generals' feature of the game, which rewards the guy who's winning with special abilities and units.

Despite a large proportion of utterly boring maps, lingering lag and incessant patching, *C&C's* online game remains as it always has – fast, furious and a lot of fun. This time, of course, the big explosions rather than the big-budget video take centre stage, and despite the cheapened presentation elsewhere, multiplayer *C&C* is still an intoxicating experience. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 127) **87**

MULTIPLAYER SCORE **75**

Same meat, different gravy



The explosive effects are absolutely fantastic, but too many nukes make games slow down.

TCATM RACE DRIVER

REAL CARS, REAL TRACKS, REAL RACING...



"A SUPERLATIVE
RACING EXPERIENCE"

PC Format

"THE MOST VISUALLY
STUNNING RACER EVER"

PC GAMEPLAY



Live the drama of real life racing as you take control of Ryan McKane's career



Real-life collisions, with an unprecedented damage system



Multiplayer - up to 20 players across LAN & Internet, and 4 players on Xbox



38 licensed circuits, 13 global championships and 42 official cars



BTCC DTM



Codemasters

GENIUS AT PLAY

Download the latest demo www.codemasters.com/tocaracedriver

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FILM LICENCES SUPERTEST

It's Oscar time at **ZONE**. Or is it the Razzies? **Mark Hill** hosts the award ceremony

WE LOVE seeing our favourite films turned into games. At least we love the idea. Because the unfortunate reality is more often than not, developers make a pig's ear out of movie conversions. Just think of the big names we had to leave out: *Planet Of The Apes*, *Spider-Man*, *The Italian Job*, *Evil Dead*, *The Lord Of The Rings*... the list

goes on. But there must be some classics among the turkeys. To root them out, **PC ZONE** took to the pub, hastily scribbled shortlist in hand, to discuss the best use of a film licence in a PC game. Roll film...

MOVIE MADNESS

Richie: If you think of the old games based on films, like

A View To A Kill...

Mark: *The Untouchables*, *RoboCop*...

Richie: Yeah, you used to have different portions of the game that were based on certain scenes of the films. A shoot out bit, a racing bit, and so on. But they don't do that anymore.

Martin: Nine out of ten film licenses are awful.

Mark: The thing is, with licenses it's very much a case of a developer being given a job to do and a certain amount of time to do it in. There's no real inspiration or vision, just a bunch of dollar signs.

Martin: And there are always going to be idiots who think, "Well, the film was damn good, so the game must be good too".

THE CONTENDERS

HARRY POTTER & THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS
ISSUE 124, 74%



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2
ISSUE 110, 93%



STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER
ISSUE 114, 83%



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST
ISSUE 115, 91%



THE THING
ISSUE 121, 82%



EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE
ISSUE 103, 76%



THE JURY

STEVE
'THE THING'
HILL



RICHIE
'MASTER YODA'
SHOEMAKER



MARTIN
'HUDSON'
KORDA



MARK
'HARRY'
HILL



BRIDGE COMMANDER

Steve: I thought I was doing something wrong playing this. I can't believe it's a game. I find *Star Trek* really boring and this captured that perfectly. It's just laughably dull.

Mark: I like *Star Trek*, but I thought it was one of the most boring games I've ever come across.

Steve: You just sit in a chair and talk to people.

Mark: Well, you don't – that's the problem. It's like you don't even exist. The whole idea is that the captain is supposed to be you, the player, which is why there's just a silhouette of a head on the cover. So they don't give you a voice, or a face or a body, which leaves you like a floating essence on the bridge. When another ship's captain speaks to you, you can't answer, so they end up having a conversation with your first officer.

Martin: It's just like *Klingon Academy* with the gimmick of being able to turn around in the bridge.

Richie: I think the battles work quite well. It's not a very challenging game, but it's a good one to watch.

Mark: But you spend all your time going from one place to another, having people talk to you and telling you where to go next. It gets so boring so quickly.

Martin: The lack of recognisable



Star Trek space battles have never been so dull as in Bridge Commander. And that's saying something.

characters doesn't help. You get Picard for a bit...

Mark: It would be so much better if you played as Picard, and your ship was the Enterprise.

Martin: Exactly. You don't want to be yourself, you want to be the star of the story.

Mark: And the rigid mission structure is just so frustrating.

Richie: All the games focus on the combat, but the point of *Star Trek* is exploration.

The only one that did that was *Birth Of The Federation*.

Martin: They always try to avoid fighting in the shows.

Steve: And try to shag alien women. Or was that just

Shatner? I've never watched

The Next Generation. For me it's *The Simpsons*, *Top Of The Pops 2* and then it's time to get a cup of tea. In my house, when *Star Trek* starts you know it's time to make dinner before *EastEnders*.

Mark: It's a real wasted opportunity. If you'd had the freedom to explore the universe, and visit planets, almost in an *Elite* sort of way, it could have been amazing.

THE THING

Martin: I didn't find the film particularly scary, to be honest, and the game even less so. Everything is scripted. You walk into a room and a cut-scene shows you the monster.

Steve: It means all the



"Yes dear, whatever you say. Now put the Klingons back on."

suspense is removed.

Mark: The best thing about the film is the really tense atmosphere it creates, and you don't get that, even with the whole idea of not knowing who's been turned.

Martin: It's hard to feel paranoid about a game character. It's not like they feel like real people, or have facial expressions or anything else.

Richie: You just get icons, which is kind of pathetic.

Mark: Plus, the film is about one alien, and the suspense around its identity. Here you

just get lots of little creatures scuttling about.

Martin: It's just a glorified third-person shooter really. There's no building up of tension, you're just thrown into it. Not even the big monsters are scary.

Steve: The levels are really boring too, just big empty boxes.

Martin: When we saw the trailer for it, it looked like it was going to be a brilliant psychological horror game, but it isn't at all.

Mark: Some of the ideas are really good, but it's just

implemented so simplistically.

Steve: It's just a load of wandering around in the snow.

Mark: They tried to turn it into *Half-Life* too. You've got the scuttling creatures and then halfway through all these government soldiers turn up to cover it up and you have to fight them too. It's very much a console game, with all the icons and the lack of depth.

Richie: And the control system is really annoying too.

Martin: The bottom line is that it's just not scary.

Mark: Another wasted opportunity. I love the film.

Steve: Not as good as *They Live*.

Mark: You've gotta be kidding!



A classic example of psychological horror is reduced to a rather simplistic console shooter in The Thing. What a bleedin' waste.



Three games in one. But *Aliens Vs Predator 2* has as many weaknesses as it does strengths.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR 2

Martin: Now, there's a game! Brilliant. Scariest game ever.
Mark: Nah. The first one was scarier. It's basically three games in one. The marine section, which is very much a traditional FPS. The predator one, which is atrocious, as it was in the first game.
Martin: It's not that bad.
Mark: I hated it, and it looks terrible too. The *Predator* films are set in contemporary Earth anyway, which works much better than these fluffy alien worlds.
Martin: The first few levels look awful, but it gets better. Although they're set in corridors,

which doesn't really work for a predator.
Mark: And then you've got the alien level, which is pure genius.
Martin: I disagree, I think the alien one is the worst. It's just a puzzle game, where you have to find your way out of places.
Mark: It's not particularly great gameplay, but it's just so different, and it does a brilliant job of putting you in the role of one of the aliens. It's such a good idea to have you start as an embryo, scurrying around the floor, finding someone to infect, then bursting out of their chest. Actually playing through all this rather than seeing it in some cut-scene is cool.



Martin: Unfortunately you don't get to work with other aliens though.
Richie: What, go into an office with them to share a box of doughnuts? They could have made a superb game with just the marines. Just a direct rip-off of the movie *Aliens*.
Steve: Yeah, being a marine is by far the best bit anyway.
Martin: I agree, but they've put the licence to good use.
Steve: I was actually quite scared playing it, to the extent that I thought I heard something in the kitchen. I was playing in the dead of night, with the lights off, trying to make myself scared. And I did unnerve myself.
Mark: Yeah, but under those conditions you'd have been scared by a sock puppet.
Martin: I went to get some fish and chips in the dead of night after playing it for eight hours and I was terrified. Every noise



The Most Unexpected Use Of A Licence award goes to *Emperor: Battle For Dune*.

sounded like a predator. I think I actually pissed myself a little bit.
Mark: I've never understood why they brought the two concepts together though.
Richie: Well, it started off as a comic.
Mark: But what's the point? Just get rid of the predator. He's a waste of space.
Richie: It's like having Popeye against Mickey Mouse.

HARRY POTTER

Steve: I haven't read the books, I didn't like the films, and I hated the games.
Richie: It's probably the one that comes closest to the films.
Mark: It does tie in very directly, unlike the others, to the point where all the characters are made to look like the actors who play them in the movies.

Martin: But it's all so simplistic and repetitive.
Mark: Like I said in the reviews, the one thing you have to keep in mind is that this is aimed squarely at kids. Just like children shouldn't be playing *AvP2*, I'd argue that adults shouldn't be playing this. It would be an insult to their intelligence really.
Richie: But the point of the books and the films is that grown-ups enjoy them too. That's why they're so popular.
Mark: Yeah, and the weird thing is that the PS2 versions of the games are actually more adult-oriented. But the point I always make is that there are hardly any decent PC games for young children, so you shouldn't knock it because of that.



Both *Harry Potter* games are aimed squarely at kiddies.



THE SHAPE OF LICENCES TO COME



Enter *The Matrix* promises to be classy.

LOTS OF FILMS ON THE WAY TO YOUR PC

Coming soon, we have the welcome return to that great '80s action hero *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb*. But that's just the start of a Hollywood avalanche.

Gaming regulars *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* return with *Galaxies* and *Knights Of The Old Republic* for the former and *Elite Force II* for the latter, while elsewhere everyone is getting quietly excited about Shiny's adaptation of *The Matrix*.

After a great outing on the Spectrum, World War II POW jailbreak classic *The Great Escape* is being remade. But if you'd rather run your own movie studio than play poor game versions of films, you might want to wait for Lionhead's *The Movies*.



Would you play a game with this guy in it?

Steve: No, you should knock it because it's so poor. I wouldn't even let children play this muck.
Martin: It's not that bad. At least

"The story's told through cut-scenes with a bloke in a beard trying to do a Brian Blessed"

STEVE HILL
 ON WESTWOOD'S APPROACH TO STORYTELLING

you get to do some exploring, it's not all strictly linear, and it has some good sub-games.
Mark: The first game was better than the second though. They tried to make it longer and just made it more repetitive, and even easier.
Richie: But little kids are better at playing platform games than us, so what's the sense in that?
Steve: It's for babies. They can suckle a nipple with one hand and play this with the other.

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE

Richie: It's the worst game here, but it's probably the best use of the licence. I haven't read the books because life's too short, but Westwood had a brilliant idea making an RTS out of it. With spices as resources and the different houses, it fits perfectly. I'm talking more about *Dune 2* though, which started the whole RTS movement, anyway.
Mark: There's some great worms in this one. That's about as much as I would say about it.
Richie: I just like that they took the licence and did something completely unexpected with it.
Mark: Well, it wasn't unexpected by the time *Emperor* came along. There was a French game that came out around the same time which went for the more obvious approach of action/adventure. It was totally rubbish, of course.
Steve: The film is one of those that's always on cable and I never get round to watching.
Mark: It's a very flawed film, because David Lynch tried to fit in so much information from these really bulky books and it doesn't really work. But it's still

fascinating to watch, because Lynch is a genius. Aesthetically, it's both disturbing and entrancing.
Richie: Yeah, I hate a lot of it, but I still watch it every couple of years.
Mark: There's some really sick and twisted stuff going on, which is the kind of thing you never get in games.
Steve: It's the old Westwood trick, the story is told through cut-scenes with real actors – some bloke in a beard trying to do a Brian Blessed. So you watch all this FMV and then you go back to moving these tiny

tanks and stuff. It's a reasonable RTS, but really just the same as all the others.

JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

Richie: It's flawed in so many ways, but when you watch the *Star Wars* movies, there's two things you want to do. One is to fly an X-Wing and the other is to run around with a lightsaber. And when you get the lightsaber,

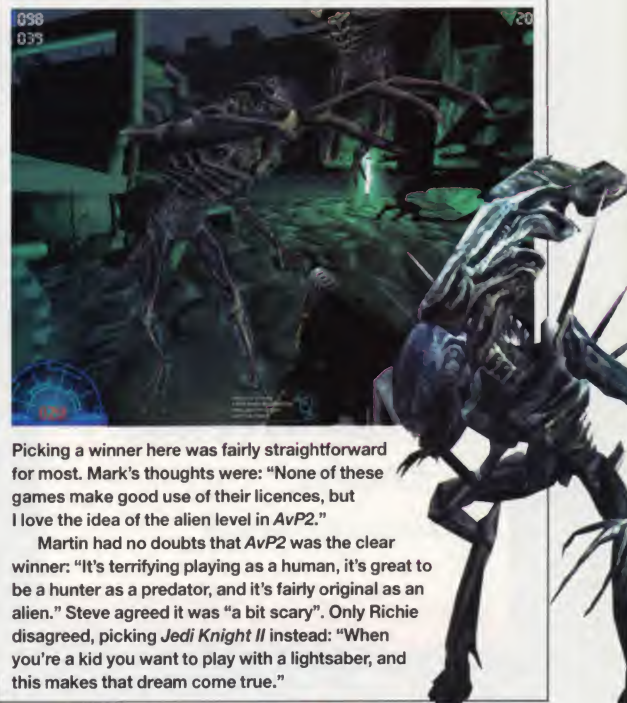


Jedi Knight II – rubbish. Until you get the lightsaber that is...

Jedi Knight II is brilliant. You have to play through four hours of rubbish levels before you get it though.
Mark: There are some levels in there that could have been designed 15 years ago. They're appalling.
Martin: Until you get the Jedi powers it's not really worth playing. Before that the game is just pointless. It could be any shooter. It makes you wonder why they bothered with the first few hours, because it's fantastic afterwards.
Mark: It's got those kind of levels where you can be stuck for hours searching for the window in an upper corner somewhere or the hidden button.
Richie: Until I got the lightsaber I was thinking of giving it a low 70s score.
Mark: I really have a problem with the Kyle character you play. Some old guy with an 80s beard. What you really want is to play as Luke Skywalker.
Steve: Why invent some guy with a beard when you have characters everyone knows and wants to be?
Richie: I don't agree. I like the fact they've come up with new characters. It's just the way he looks.
Steve: If he was good enough he'd be in the films. **[AVP]**

THE WINNER IS... AVP2

THE TERROR WINS OUT



Picking a winner here was fairly straightforward for most. Mark's thoughts were: "None of these games make good use of their licences, but I love the idea of the alien level in *AvP2*."
 Martin had no doubts that *AvP2* was the clear winner: "It's terrifying playing as a human, it's great to be a hunter as a predator, and it's fairly original as an alien." Steve agreed it was "a bit scary". Only Richie disagreed, picking *Jedi Knight II* instead: "When you're a kid you want to play with a lightsaber, and this makes that dream come true."



...cos let's face it: it's any wee lad's ultimate fantasy.

THE VERDICT

TRUST RICHIE SHOEMAKER TO SPOIL A UNANIMOUS DECISION

Winner
Runner-up
Film that should be adapted



STEVE
 AvP2
Jedi Knight II
 Scum



RICHIE
Jedi Knight II
 The Thing
 Escape To Victory



MARTIN
 AvP2
Jedi Knight II
 Jingle All The Way



MARK
 AvP2
 Harry Potter
 Deep Blue Sea

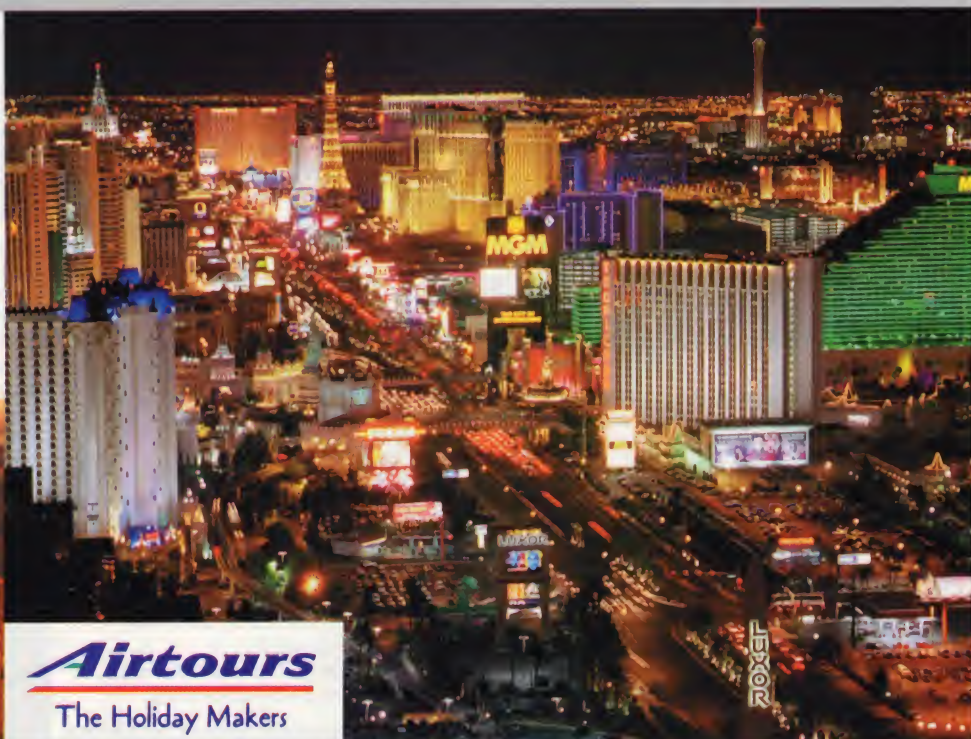
£12,000 Prize Quiz

one reader wins all this

Win: Vegas holiday for two

A week's holiday for two in Las Vegas, provided by Airtours. Your flight and hotel are included in the prize.

www.pczone.co.uk/quiz



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We have teamed up with Philips to offer you an award-winning 28" Pixel Plus TV, a DVD/SACD Digital Home Entertainment System and a Nike Philips Digital Audio Player.*

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PHILIPS

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£12,000 Prize Quiz

one reader wins all this



Win: Multivision PC

The latest Multivision Ionix PC. It's fast, with loads of memory and perfect for multimedia applications.

www.pczone.co.uk/quiz



Specification: AMD Athlon XP 2800, 512Mb RAM, 120Gb Hard Drive, 16" Sharp TFT Screen, 4x DVD ReWriter



Win: Gaming bundle



This prize is perfect for the keen gamer – Universal Interactive are giving away a PS2, an Xbox, a GameCube, free games for a year, a copy of their latest blockbuster "Jurassic Park" plus a TV to play it on!

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HARDWARE

MOBILE GAMING GOODNESS



■ **HARD WIRED** Steve Spence

▲ With all the recent hardware announcements of late, I've been travelling a fair bit this issue to see all the latest, greatest technologies (current and future) from the likes of ATI, NVIDIA, Intel and their respective partners.

Things are already beginning to heat up, as we've reported over the last couple of months, and by the looks of things we're going to see even more exciting stuff leading all the way up to early autumn.

The only drawback this month has been near total isolation from my gaming PC. But thankfully, under the guise of journalism, we managed to secure a gaming spec laptop to help while away the travelling hours – which I duly did. In fact, I probably played more games away than I ever managed back home under the iron fist of Mr Dave Woods.

Benchmarks are one thing, but real-world testing is quite another, and even though we weren't using the likes of NV28M or the new mobile chips NVIDIA is announcing this month, we were able to dabble in a wide selection of games, the pinnacle of which had to be an hour-long *Counter-Strike* session via an 802.11a wireless network out in California. It's pretty cool to be sitting in the sun outside on an untethered laptop, fragging your friends back in Blighty.

With the arrival of DX9 chips into the mobile market, and such new low power, high performance mobile processors as the Pentium-M from Intel, it looks like laptops will be closing that gap even further. If they can become completely separate systems in their own right and equal their desktop counterparts' horsepower (albeit in sleek form), hopefully we'll see them break the stereotype of being seen as little more than dumbed-down PCs.

And you know what that means, don't you? In the future, all gamers will have suntans.

MOBILE MOJO

NVIDIA brings GeForce FX power to mobile systems



NVIDIA's new GeForce FX Go5200 and Go5600 graphics chips for laptop computers.

THERE'S NO DOUBT the humble laptop has come on leaps and bounds over the last 18 months. Before chips like the GeForce 2 Go series, 3D acceleration in a mobile form was almost a total myth. Since that time both NVIDIA and ATI have released GPUs for DirectX7 and 8/8.1, and this month NVIDIA is ready with its DirectX9 mobile part – GeForce FX Go.

Similar to its announcement of the mid and entry level desktop parts last month, NVIDIA's GeForce FX Go range will consist of a pair of GPUs, namely the GeForce FX Go5600 – the performance mobile offering – and GeForce FX Go5200, a mainstream DX9 GPU. It's the first time any manufacturer has targeted more than a single market in a single release of a generation of mobile GPUs, and it looks like NVIDIA is as determined to storm the mobile gaming sector as it is to regain its hold on the desktop side.

These two new mobile GPUs will ship complete with all of the features of the desktop chips. They will bring both improved performance in existing games, as well as supplying the first true compatibility with the kind of titles due over the coming months which are going to rely further on Pixel and Vertex shaders for DX9.

As a further boost to the mobile gaming arena in general this month, EA is announcing that it will begin to offer support for gamers playing EA games on laptops, as well as for their desktop-system counterparts. Because of the relative diversity between the implementations of mobile graphics and drivers, this support will be unfortunately exclusive to notebooks using NVIDIA 3D accelerators only. EA is also intending to test all future releases on NVIDIA mobile chips prior to shipping game code to minimise the problems gamers will have to typically encounter.



“NVIDIA is as determined to storm the mobile gaming sector as it is to regain its hold on the desktop side”

MOBILE GEFORCE VS DESKTOP GEFORCE: THE SPECS

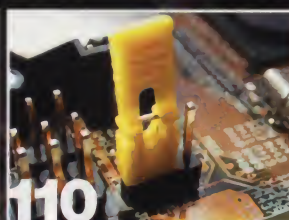
| Name | GeForce FX | GeForce FX Go5600 | GeForce FX Go5200 |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| AGP | 8x | 8x | 8x |
| DirectX9 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Pixel Shader Version | 2.0+ | 2.0+ | 2.0+ |
| Vertex Shader Version | 2.0+ | 2.0+ | 2.0+ |
| Textures Per Pass | 16 | 16 | 16 |
| Z-Cull | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| UDA | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Process | 0.13 | 0.13 | 0.15 |
| Core Clock | >= 500Mhz | Up to 350Mhz | Up to 300Mhz |
| Memory Clock | 1Ghz | 700Mhz | 600Mhz |
| Effective Bandwidth | 32Gb/sec | 19.2Gb/sec | 9.6Gb/sec |
| Pixel Pipelines | 8 | 4 | 4 |
| Pixel Shaders | 8 | 6 | 4 |



ZONE BENCHMARKS
Updated monthly



OVERCLOCKING
Get something for nothing



DEAR WANDY
Got a problem you can't fix?



BUYER'S GUIDE
The best kit, the lowest prices

DRIVER WATCH

An extremely quiet month on the driver front, with DX9 drivers still conspicuous by their absence

MOTHERBOARDS

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | VERSION | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|----------|-----------|--------|-------------------|
| Intel | ICH2.INF | 3.20.1008 | 1.49Mb | support.intel.com |
| Intel | ICH4.INF | 4.04.1007 | 1.31Mb | support.intel.com |
| SIS | IDE | 2.0.3 | 5.42Mb | download.sis.com |
| SIS | AGP | 1.1.4 | 5.38Mb | download.sis.com |
| VIA | Hyperion | 4.46 | 1.31Mb | www.viaarena.com |

GRAPHICS

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | VERSION | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------|----------------|
| ATI | Catalyst | 6.14.01.6292 | 5.62Mb | www.ati.com |
| ATI | Catalyst | 6.14.10.4019 | 4.62Mb | www.ati.com |
| Matrox | Parhelia | 1.03.00.043 | 8.22Mb | www.matrox.com |
| NVIDIA | Detonator 40 | 41.09 | 16.3Mb | www.nvidia.com |

SOUND

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | VERSION | SIZE | WEB |
|--------------|------------|-------------|---------|------------------------|
| Creative | Audigy | 11.2 | 12.67Mb | uk.europe.creative.com |
| Creative | Audigy 2 | 11.03.02.05 | 5.86Mb | uk.europe.creative.com |
| Hercules | Fortissimo | 6.07 | 14.7Mb | europe.hercules.com |

ALL'S QUIET on the driver front this month, with only a couple of minor updates to speak of – the most significant of which being VIA's update of its Hyperion range to version 4.46. The new build features a fix for overwrite problems and updates VIA's AGP driver to the latest release.

On the graphics side, things have been almost eerily quiet on the NVIDIA side for some time now. DirectX9 drivers still weren't available from the site as we went to press, but the arrival of GeForce FX boards into retail this month means that by the time this magazine hits the shelves they should be finally available for download. Aside from adding support for DX9, plus the new family of chips, scrutiny of recent leaked beta files has shown that certain versions may also feature a temperature monitoring panel, which will be invaluable for those inclined to overclock.

SNIPPETS



RAPTOR BITES SCSI

While there are a few top-end SATA drives which rival it, the storage king has historically always been SCSI, something which is set to change this month with the news of the Western Digital 10K RPM SATA 'Raptor' Drive.

Delivering data quicker than any current IDE or SATA offering, the new drive is as fast as the likes of the Seagate Cheetah U320, but costing significantly less.

PENTIUM MORE?

As if the Pentium 4 wasn't already quite long in the tooth, this month sees news of at least two further incarnations for the chip this year. Some time before the summer Intel is apparently intending to increase the front side bus of the CPUs to 800MHz (200MHz Quad Pumped) with HyperThreading becoming available across the full range of clock speeds. Later, possibly during late autumn, a new 90-nanometer chip codenamed Prescott will be making an appearance. Featuring a new instruction known as PNI, the chip will be quite similar to today's 3.06GHz but with improved HyperThreading and 1Mb of cache. Plans are for the new architecture to take us all the way to 5GHz.

FOOTIE MICE

While users complain daily about the Windows user interface and bugs that riddle applications such as MS Office, one of the few areas you can't fault Microsoft is its mice. Since the original Intellimouse Optical, Microsoft has dominated the rodent scene and six months after their last load of squeakers it's launching some special edition mice in 'football colours'.

Saying that, the description might be stretching it a little, but the new range will include three Wireless Opticals (blue, black & white), two Wired Opticals (Red, Blue) a black Wheel Mouse Optical and a black version of their Notebook Optical Mouse. Prices start around the £25 mark.



WATCH OUT IPOD

Intel's Portable Media Player set to make Apple feel rotten

WITH MP3 PLAYERS successfully permeating just about every household in the UK, Intel has been developing the theme of personal media further, taking it well into the 21st century with the XScale chip – the centrepiece of the company's new Portable Media Player.

It may look like a dumbed-down PDA, but this outward simplicity disguises a powerful device capable of delivering the average techoid on the move a wide range of audio and video media.

At the heart of the Portable Media Player platform is a 400Mhz XScale processor, but that's where the similarities with its Pocket PC counterparts end. The PMP is designed like a micro PC, and makes use of yet another proprietary Microsoft OS labelled Media2Go – WinCE 4.2. The beauty of the PMP is the way it utilises the host PC and the very latest H.264 codec to resample any video sent to the device.

Instead of simply copying the files directly onto the drive 'as-is', it re-samples the footage to best suit the screen size and audio hardware, removing pixels that won't be seen and ensuring smooth playback. While this may seem a little labour intensive, the net result is up to a 40% reduction in the bit-rate of the media without any appreciable loss in quality and all this delivered at an extremely watchable 30FPS.

In terms of connectivity, Intel is looking to make the PMP as flexible as possible, and has already made provision for USB 2.0, IEEE-1394, 802.11a/b and the possibility even of Bluetooth.

As a reference design, Intel or Microsoft won't be making systems themselves, instead they intend to make the design available for manufacturers to produce their own, and the likes of Samsung, SonicBlue and Viewsonic have already expressed an interest in the product.

"Outward simplicity disguises a powerful device capable of delivering a wide range of audio and video media"



The prototype device pictured here had an integrated 4" transfective screen and a 20Gb hard drive, making it an ideal gadget for the geek on the go.

PCZONE BENCHMARKS

Comprehensive new benchmarks for every new graphics card. Check back each month for updates...

THE MOST important aspect of a graphics card is, of course, the chip the board is based around. And the only way to work out if one chip is better than another is to run it through a stringent set of benchmarks. Which is what we've done.

OUR GUARANTEE

Because of the subtle differences in today's 3D cards, ensuring we're as accurate as possible is vital if we're going to be able to advise you fairly. Each month we'll update these as and when new cards or drivers are released, to show you which card is the fastest or the best value for money. You'll also be able to see where your card stands in comparison to all the new releases.

TEST SYSTEM

There's little point in testing out tomorrow's 3D chips on yesterday's hardware so we've chosen one of the quickest AMD processors out there – the Athlon XP 3000+ with the improved Barton core. By choosing such a cutting-edge chip we can increase the total range of scores and reduce CPU limitation, thus increasing accuracy. The other key area where a GPU can end up bottlenecked by the PC is raw memory bandwidth, to which end we've opted for the ASUS A7N8X, the best nForce2 implementation on the market.

CONFIGURATION

The next step is to standardise the method and level to which

boards are tested. Starting at the BIOS, all non-essential hardware is disabled and memory timings are pushed to their limit to maximise bandwidth and give the lowest latencies possible.

Secondly comes the operating system. After installing Windows XP, SP1 is installed, followed by DirectX9. We don't install a graphics driver until the entire system is prepared and imaged, but chipset drivers and USB drivers are rolled on, thus letting us restore a test machine quickly, and more importantly giving us the same software with which to test every new card.

With the OS installed and service packed, optimisations are made, including disabling System Restore, Automatic Updates, sound and networking,

plus little resident programs such as MSN Messenger. Virtual memory is fixed at 2.5x the system's total RAM.

When we're happy the system itself is fully stable and ready for testing, all the benchmark software is installed, patched and prepared for testing with custom ini files and timedemos where necessary.


Finally, the entire windows install plus benchmarks is imaged onto a backup server, providing us with a clean build of our benchmark system as and when we need it.

BENCHMARKING

With a system prepared, imaged and tested, it's time to install the first graphics board and driver. As a rule we only use the latest

WHQL certified files as this ensures we're testing with stable and bug-free drivers, though with new kit that isn't always possible. Of course, as soon as WHQL drivers are available we re-test it and adjust scores.

Each benchmark is run at least five times, with each number recorded and the 'spread' or deviation between scores calculated. As long as those five numbers fit within a certain tolerance (1% maximum) then we move onto the next set.

Between tests we restart the benchmark, and we reboot the system between changing resolutions or graphics settings as many games and benchmarks are prone to memory leaking which can throw all the scores askew. 

BENCHMARKS

TEST SYSTEM

HARDWARE

Processor AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 'Barton' 2167Mhz with 512Kb L2 cache
Motherboard ASUS A7N8X nForce2 Motherboard
Memory 512Mb Corsair PC3200 (DDR400 RAM), 2x256Mb DIMM in dual-channel operation
Hard Drive Western Digital 120Gb WD1200JB ATA100 hard drive with 8Mb cache, 7200RPM
Sound Disabled for all benchmarks

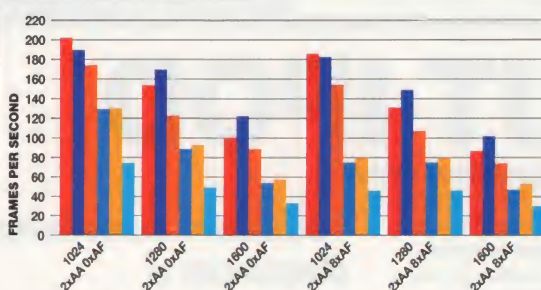
PLATFORM

Windows XP Professional
 Service Pack 1
 DirectX 9

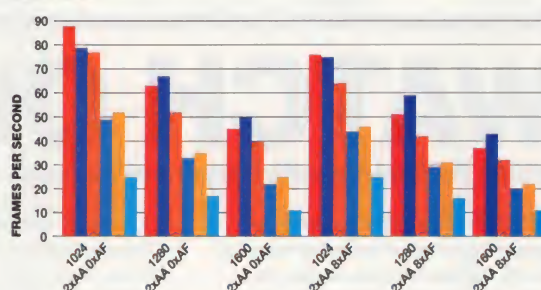
DRIVERS

ATI – Catalyst 3.1
 NVIDIA – Detonator 42.72

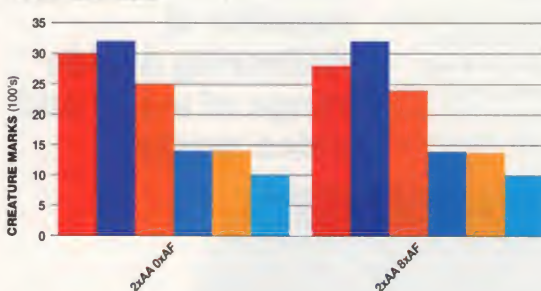
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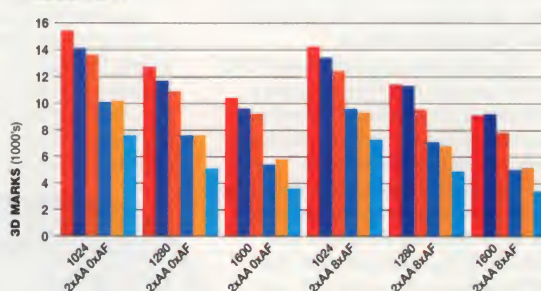
AQUANOX



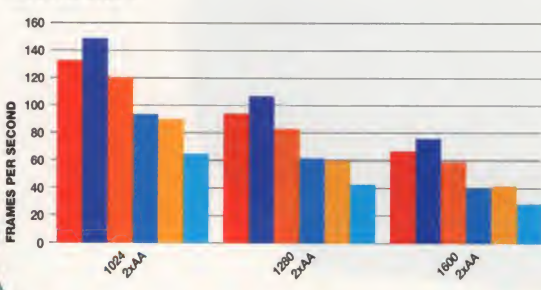
CODECREATURES



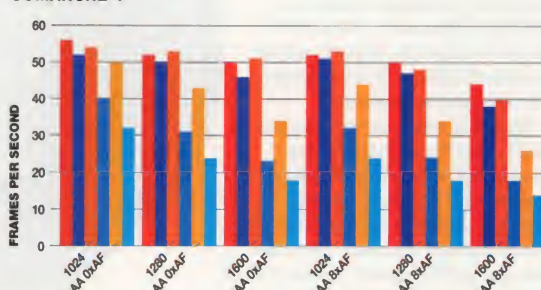
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BUILT FOR FUN

PART TWO:

OVERCLOCKING IS EASY

You don't get something for nothing in this world... unless you overclock. Steve Spence shows you how to take your system to the edge and back again

IN ISSUE 126 we showed you how to slap the innards of your system into a shiny new aluminium case, complete with stealth cooling, neon lights and a miniature goldfish bowl. So now it's cooler and quieter than ever, but *Quake III* still isn't breaking the 300fps mark. Which brings us to our next step in improving your PC... the dreaded overclocking.

Before you get too excited over the prospect of ratcheting

that extra bit of performance out of your PC, there are two things you need to know. The first is written in the disclaimer on this page – what we're about to tell you could leave your system in a permanent state of death if you're not careful.

The second thing is that you are going to have to acquaint yourself a little better with your equipment before you start tinkering with the intimate regions of your PC's BIOS.

FREE PERFORMANCE FOR BEGINNERS

As the name suggests, overclocking is a method by which you run core components of your system, such as your CPU, beyond the clock frequency at which they were sold. And though it might sound dangerous, as long as you're sensible, it's pretty hard to do any damage.

When the likes of Intel or AMD churn out processors from

their fabrication plants, they don't have separate production lines for each and every frequency of chip. For example, there are five 533MHz Pentium 4s alone (not including the 3.06GHz HT chip), and for Intel to produce each in its own line would be uneconomical. Instead Intel produces one or two grades of die, and in many cases lock the final frequencies below the actual capabilities of the part, which gives most chips some headroom for liberal tweaking. In essence this means there are plenty of 2.53GHz chips out there that will break 3GHz, and if you're lucky a few 3GHz CPUs which will go much further, maybe even into the heady heights of the fabled 4GHz.

If you've read the disclaimer and you've decided that you want to get yourself a piece of this 'free performance', you need to understand a little about how your CPU works. Have you noticed us talking about something called the FSB when we're banging on about new motherboard and processor technologies? This is the Front Side Bus, and it describes the interface which connects the CPU to your memory and all of the other core components on your motherboard (PCI, AGP etc). On today's newest chips, the FSB is 133MHz in the case of the Pentium 4, and 166MHz for the latest Athlon XP. For the Pentium 4 this bus is Quad-Pumped (multiplied by 4) which is what gives Intel its quoted 533MHz FSB.

DO THE MATH

The processors themselves run much quicker than this core frequency, however, and that's where the second magic number, that of the CPU's multiplier, comes in.

Unlike the FSB, which can be changed in your BIOS, the multiplier of retail CPUs is fixed to specify the chip's operating frequency. The current 'King of the Hill' – Intel's P4 3.06GHz (HT) – has a 133MHz FSB and a

multiplier of 23, which multiplied together give the chip's final working frequency of 3066MHz.

Still with us? OK, with the multiplier fixed, the most obvious, and best place to start overclocking is to raise your CPU's FSB. By raising it in your BIOS by 1-2MHz increments, booting into Windows after each successful test and running a few games to check for early warning signs of instability (such as glitches or corruption when looping 3DMark2001), you can easily determine how much additional horsepower you can get from your chip before embarking on more exotic or riskier solutions. Should your system fail to boot from a particularly adventurous overclock, don't panic. Nine times out of ten you can restore normal service by clearing the CMOS (check your motherboard manual for specifics).

It gets more complicated, though. A few components (AGP and PCI interfaces, for example) don't like being run much above their native speeds of 66MHz and 33MHz respectively. To overcome this, the motherboard has a set of dividers (again, you set this in the BIOS – just do the calculations properly), which reduce the clock speeds of the

Losing your CPU to meltdown due to lack of cooling is a chilling prospect.



"If you want a piece of 'free performance' you need to understand a little about how your CPU works"



Certain cooling systems include controller kits to regulate the temperature with.

interface to these components based on the current FSB frequency. Every time the bus speed increases, so will that of the PCI and AGP. So it's worth working out what speeds they're running at and increasing the dividers – if your board supports it – to keep them within spec.

By simply increasing your bus speeds, and nothing else, you can expect anything up to 10 per cent more MHz, gratis. And once you've found this limit, you can just leave it there. But a brave few will go further. Much further.

INTO THE BREACH

Being a digital system, your CPU talks in binary (1s and 0s), which if you wanted to visualise basically looks like a bunch of square waves on a graph. As you ramp up the CPU speed, those waves get shorter and more bunched up, so the numbers get increasingly more difficult for the chip to read. You'll know the moment this starts happening too – either by graphical glitches or lock-ups and random rebooting.

Overcoming this initial instability is also quite simple. In the BIOS there's an option to raise the power delivered directly to the CPU's core (generally referred to as Vcore) and a notch or two generally irons out any minor instabilities. But here's the kicker – the more current you pump in, the more heat your PC is going to produce, which in turn means instability, unless you upgrade your CPU cooling.

We looked at aircooling solutions in issue 126, but this month we're leaping in with both feet and playing with one of the most hardcore cooling solutions available today – VapoChill. **PCZ**

WARNING!
OVERCLOCKING
YOUR PC IS A
RISKY BUSINESS.
SO IF YOU BUST
YOUR MACHINE
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FAULT!

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If the idea of cranking your CPU towards the point of no return makes you a little queasy, you're not alone as your chip too is probably quaking in its mounting at the thought of having its temperature raised to meltdown levels. So for the brave (or stupid) among you who are determined to push those clock speeds to the limit, cooling solutions like the VapoChill exist.

It's available in two formats – a tower case, fitted with all the necessary gubbins, or as a kit to be fitted yourself. We've gone for the lazier option of the fully-fitted VapoChill PE (160W).

Utilising a compressor connected to a sealed system of piping which is filled with coolant, VapoChill uses the principle of phase change, from liquid to gas, to cool a copper head that's strapped directly on top of the CPU. The system is constantly monitored and adjusted by a unit called the ChillControl, which comes complete with a real-time temperature readout on the front of the case.

Because the chip ends up at sub-zero temperatures, any warm air or moisture can create condensation and fry your whole setup. To guard against this, AseTek provides a set of foam rings and heating coils which surround the CPU socket, itself packed in non-conductive thermal grease to eliminate any traces of air altogether.

Once the motherboard is prepared, it's fitted into the chassis as with any other case, and the copper head is then clamped down evenly on top of the CPU.

With the system fully installed and plumbed together, the final steps are to wire the VapoChill in among the conventional power cabling and switches. Instead of firing the PC up directly, with the cooling coming online simultaneously, throwing the power switch on the front starts the ChillControl, which in turn switches on the compressor,

but leaves the system itself suspended until the optimum pressure is reached and the CPU hits a chilly -05°C.

As default, the ChillControl module, which is the brains of the VapoChill, cools the processor at a constant -15°C. But this along with pretty much any other aspect of the ChillControl can be modified by hooking to it with a serial cable and running the supplied DOS utility.

Being brave, we tested the VapoChill with the quickest CPU we could – the 3.06GHz P4 from Intel, and the P4G8X Granite Bay motherboard from ASUS – to see just how far we could take it.

Previously, with a big fan and a heatsink, the best we'd seen from the chip was a shave over 3.2GHz – nothing to write home about. With the VapoChill we smashed that frequency pretty much immediately, with an initial overclock to 3312MHz. Cranking the chip further we achieved 3.842GHz quite stably, with no visible corruption or glitching. You'd think we'd stop there. Oh no...

Purely in the name of investigative journalism, we decided to go for the fabled 4GHz. Three voltage increases and abortive attempts later, the BIOS screen completed the POST with the glorious message 'CPU: Intel® Pentium® 4 4001MHz Processor' – result! OK, so we didn't quite break 4GHz stably, but from the below scores we're peeking over the wall and it's looking pretty exciting, to say the least.

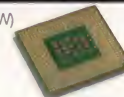
So the upshot is that as long as you're careful, and take time to read the manual (you don't stand a hope without it), then the VapoChill PE is a pretty simple, albeit comprehensive, setup to install. And it is also, without a doubt, the most impressive and effective cooling solution we've come across to date.

PCZONE VERDICT **92**
King of coolers



BENCHMARKS

TEST PLATFORM ASETEK VapoChill Deluxe (160W)
ASUS P4G8X Granite Bay
Intel 3.06GHz Pentium 4
512Mb DDR400 RAM



| INTEL PENTIUM 4 3.06GHz | @ 3066Mhz | @ 3842Mhz |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| COMANCHE 4 | 62.6fps | 73.78fps |
| PCMARK 2002 - CPU | 7608 | 9466 |
| PCMARK 2002 - MEMORY | 7848 | 9255 |

VAPOCHILL PC SPECS

COOLING APPARATUS

Max temperatures: -32°C idle, -13°C full load
Noise: 35db(A)

Power: 160W

CASE

5x 3_ Bays (hard drive)
3x 5_ Bays (CD/DVD-ROM)

Floppy Bay

Blue Power LEDs

LED Display at front for temperatures

Cooler separated from main case

Room for full-size ATX motherboard and add-on cards

RADEON 9800 PRO

FIRST LOOK

■ Expected Street Price: *£399 | Phone: N/A |
Manufacturer: ATI Technologies | www.ati.com

GRAPHICS CARD

With NVIDIA GeForce FX boards now hitting the shelves, we take an early peek at ATI's attempt to stay top of the graphics card pile

SINCE THE arrival of the Radeon 9700 Pro last autumn, the balance of power within the 3D graphics market has shifted slightly. NVIDIA, market leader since its original GeForce GPU appeared, was ousted from the top spot, and for almost six months ATI took all the performance accolades without competition.

But that dominance was challenged by the news that NVIDIA's FX boards were finally rolling out last month. Last issue we reported on ATI's answer, namely its 9800 and 9600 lines of graphics chips (codenamed R350 and RV350 respectively), and this month we've managed to get hold of one of the new flagship cards for a full dissection.

NEW RESOLUTIONS

Based on an improved Radeon 9700 Pro die, the Radeon 9800 Pro is in many ways the same DirectX9 chip. ATI has made a few key changes, though, which it hopes might even tempt owners of their first generation DX9 product. Chief among these is a modification to the design that allows more headroom for higher GPU frequencies, resulting in a core clock of 380MHz and memory at 340MHz (680MHz DDR effective).

One of the real flaws of the 9700 line was in its floating point

accuracy. While boards had to handle 128-bit floating point values, the accuracy to which those values were created differed. NVIDIA, for instance, handled 128-bit values and thus offered true 128-bit floating point, whereas the 9700 rounded 96-bit values to a 128-bit figure. For simple shaders with limited calculations, this method was passable, but for the more complex code which the card was really aspiring to deliver, you ended up with noticeable banding within colours and a loss in the overall graduation across the rendered scene. With the FX's DX9+ status in mind, ATI has now added the additional transistors required, making the 9800 Pro truly 128-bit capable.

As the 9700 became the first DirectX9 card in production, ATI is hoping to also have the first OpenGL2 component to market with the 9800, and has therefore implemented a new buffer on its pixel shaders. One of the main requirements of the (as yet unratified) GL2 standard (Currently OpenGL is at version 1.4) is the ability to calculate pixel shaders of an unlimited length. To do this, ATI has developed what it calls an F-buffer, and at the end of each calculation cycle the current result of the shader is written here instead of back across the

frame buffer.

Not only does this reduce the overhead for such calculations, but it also means the values for each channel (Red, Green, Blue and Alpha) are stored separately, which results in a much cleaner handling of transparency.


ONE VISION

Both the Smartshader and Smoothvision of the chip have seen improvement too, now both at version 2.1, the revisions including key changes to further enhance the speed and flexibility of the shaders, as well as overall efficiency. Hyper Z III (ATI's technique for avoiding hidden surface rendering) has also been tweaked (now Hyper Z III+) with an enhanced Z-Cache, and optimisations to handle stencil buffer data – one of the key components in rendering shadow volumes efficiently.

With these changes in place, ATI now claims DirectX9++ compliance, though how developers will feel about a new 'niche standard' is unclear.

Most importantly, of course, is the chip's performance. Putting the board into our shiny new Barton 3000+ test rig (see our detailed benchmarks on page 102 to see how it stacks up), it looks like there's no

question as to its superiority over the 9700 Pro, but a few driver bugs meant in a couple of cases the chip ran marginally slower than ATI's previous top card. Compared to the GeForce FX at high resolutions the comparison is much closer, with the FX winning at the likes of *UT2003*, *Codecreatures*, *Serious Sam* and *Aquanox*, but not quite hitting the mark set by the 9800 in 3DMark2001.

While it's clear that there's still quite a lot of work to be done – especially at driver level – the Radeon 9800 makes for a decent refresh over the R300/Radeon 9700. As always, we'll be able to tell you more when we get a retail card for review next month. 

“The most important aspect is performance, and there's no doubt this is superior to the 9700 Pro”

GEFORCE FX 5600 ULTRA

■ Expected Street Price: *£140 | Manufacturer: NVIDIA |
Phone: N/A | www.nvidia.co.uk

GRAPHICS CARD

Don't think you can afford a new GeForce FX card? Think again...

FIRST LOOK

IF PRICES of around the £400 mark are just a little too rich for your blood then NVIDIA has a couple of new options for you, the first being the GeForce FX 5600 Ultra.


Based on a reduced design and the same 0.13 micron process, the chip has all the hallmarks of the GeForce FX flagship, including Intellisample Antialiasing and compression, 128-bit floating point accuracy and beyond DX9 shaders (referred to as Pixel Shader 2.0+ and Vertex Shader 2.0+). Where the chip differs from the current top of the crop is in its pipeline count, reduced from eight to four, and its memory controller, which has rolled back to that of DDR-I. That said, the 350MHz GPU will have up to 256Mb of RAM (128Mb as standard,

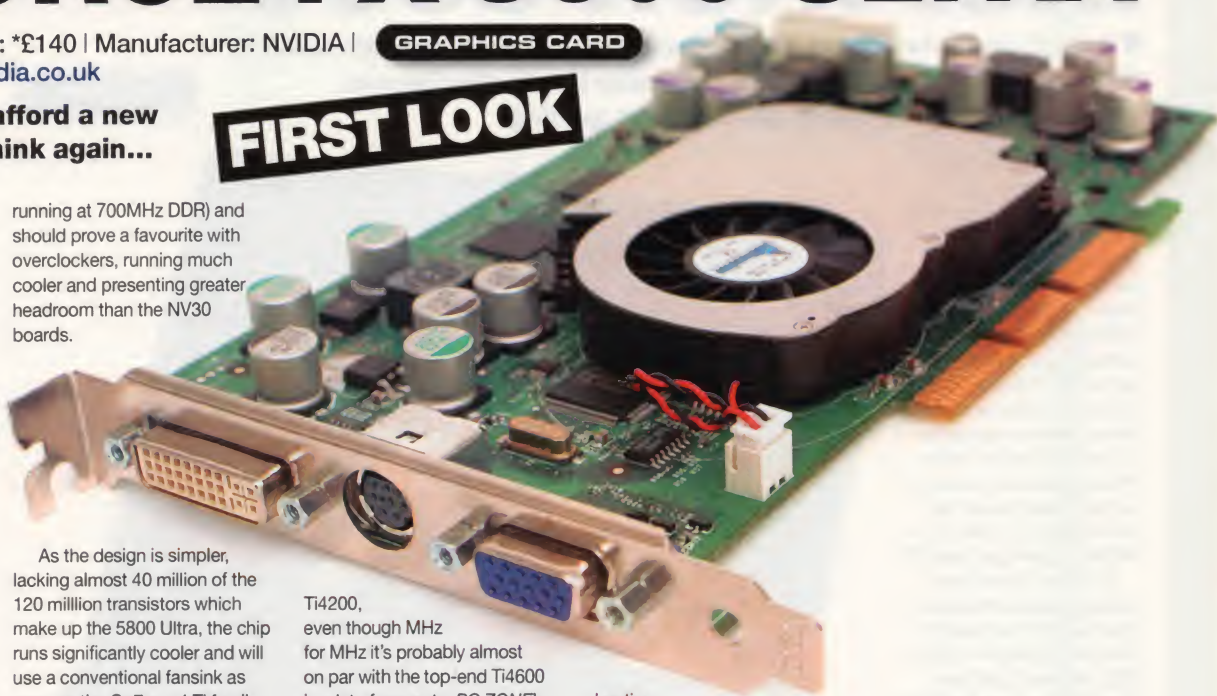
running at 700MHz DDR) and should prove a favourite with overclockers, running much cooler and presenting greater headroom than the NV30 boards.

As the design is simpler, lacking almost 40 million of the 120 million transistors which make up the 5800 Ultra, the chip runs significantly cooler and will use a conventional fansink as seen on the GeForce4 Ti family.

Performance-wise, NVIDIA is aiming for the chip to replace the space currently occupied by

Ti4200, even though MHz for MHz it's probably almost on par with the top-end Ti4600 in a lot of respects. PC ZONE's benchmarking tests showed the board to be as quick as the 9500 Pro from ATI in most cases,

beating it in a few instances even though price-wise it's probably more aligned to the non-pro chip. 



GEFORCE FX 5200 ULTRA

■ Expected Street Price: *£100 | Manufacturer: NVIDIA |
Phone: N/A | www.nvidia.co.uk

GRAPHICS CARD

The entry level GeForce FX is almost here. Skinflints rejoice...

FIRST LOOK

COMPLETING the lineup are two boards based on NVIDIA's NV34 GPU, the low-cost DX9 part. Called GeForce FX 5200, the chips are the only members of the family so far not made on 0.13 micron. NVIDIA opted to use the 0.15 micron seen on their GeForce4 family, because, when combined with a simpler GPU design, it lets them reduce prices even further still.

As an entry-level board, features such as Intellisample and DDR-II support are gone and the chip's pipelines have been reduced again from eight to four, with support for up to 128Mb of DDR-I.

As far as cards are concerned two are planned, GeForce FX 5200 Ultra, and a standard GeForce FX 5200. The first card, FX 5200 Ultra will come as standard with 128Mb of DDR clocked at 325MHz core and 650MHz memory. Like the 5600, it needs external power and a fansink to cool it, but is

only a 1-slot design. Its little brother, GeForce FX 5200 is, however, the board that's likely to generate the most interest, producing so little heat and drawing so little


current that it does away with the fan and power connector seen on every other DX9 model currently on the market. Clock frequencies are 250MHz core and 400MHz DDR memory, and pricing is targeted well below the £100 mark.

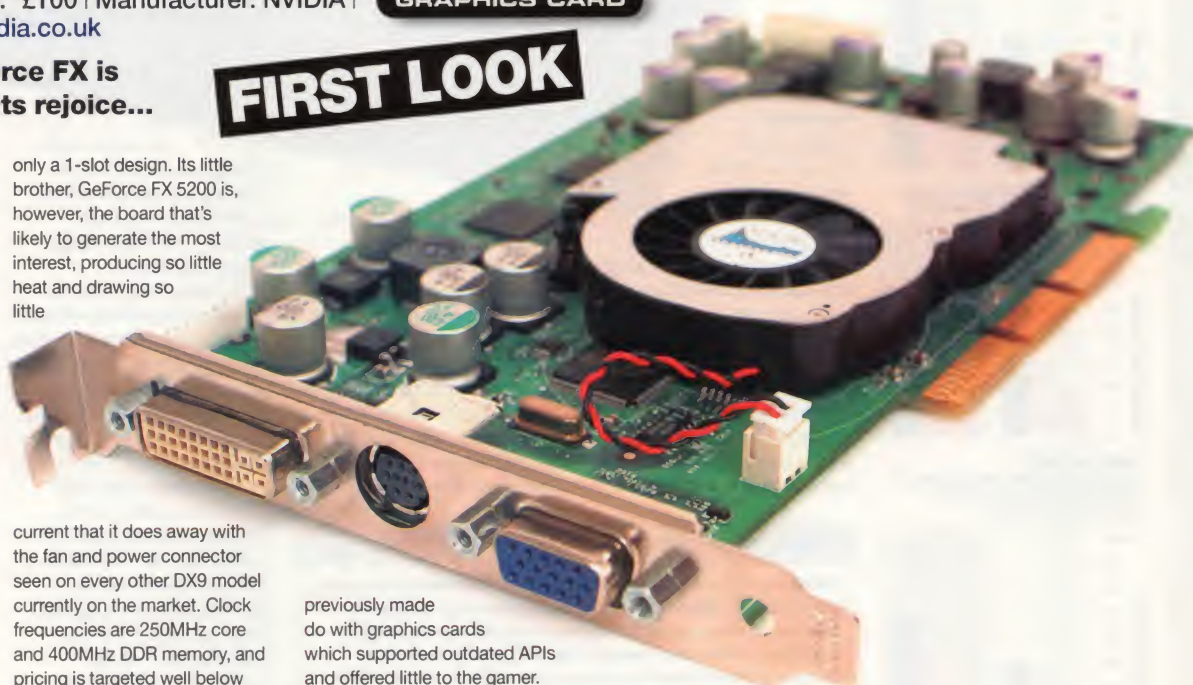
Not only does this give NVIDIA a complete DX9 family, replacing the likes of the GeForce4 MX, but it should also be a turning point for mid to low range off-the-shelf PCs which

previously made do with graphics cards which supported outdated APIs and offered little to the gamer.

Testing an FX 5200 Ultra this month, we found performance to be more than respectable, generally coming to within two thirds of the 9500 Pro, at a fraction of the cost. The lack of compression is not perfect, but

costing less than three full price games, it should set a new standard for entry-level 3D.

Fingers crossed we'll see units next month, so expect a review soon after. 



*Prices subject to change on release.

INSPIRON 8500

■ Price: £1,996 | Manufacturer: Dell | Phone: 0870 152 4699 | www.dell.co.uk

With a GeForce4 Go graphics chip under its slender bonnet, we check out Dell's latest gift to laptop gaming

LAPTOP

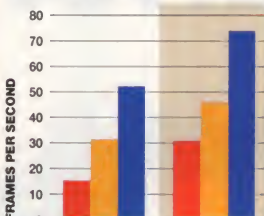


HAVING looked at an Inspiron 8200 a couple of months ago in our last mobile gaming feature, the prospect of testing another Dell didn't exactly have us excited. Dated design coupled with relatively uninspiring sound and barely passable DirectX8 performance formed a bundle that just didn't hit the mark. Rather hesitantly we agreed to check out another model, primarily because it would be our first chance to play with the newest DX8 mobile chip – NV28M, or GeForce4 Go4200.

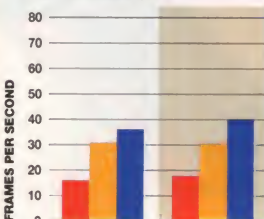
Of course, the greatest surprises happen when least expected, and that's exactly what we got with the Inspiron 8500. We really didn't see it coming. Even in the Toshiba vs Dell face-off in issue 122 there was a wrangle between function and form. The more graphically feature-rich machine, the

BENCHMARKS

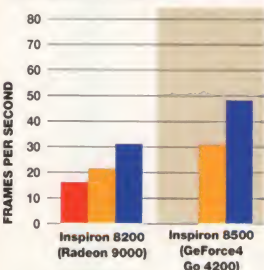
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 (2X ANTIALIASING) FLYBY



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 (2X ANTIALIASING) BOTMATCH



SERIOUS SAM 2 (2X ANTIALIASING, HIGH QUALITY, EXTREME DETAIL ADD-ON) ELEPHANT'S ATRIUM



KEY
 1600x1200 1280x1024 1024x768



Inspiron 8200, wasn't as quick off the mark as the Satellite, even though the Toshiba only offered DX7-class graphics. And the sound on the Dell was well below par, especially when put up against true 2.1 sound from Harman/Kardon.

STUNNER

Obviously Dell has been paying attention, because the 8500 is a real head-turner. Although no thinner than its predecessor, this new unit, in its luxuriant silver

décor looks much more svelte – more like a Vaio or Powerbook, with none of the cheap trim and nasty edges.

Of course the most immediate and important difference is the screen. The CRT started out its life square (1:1), and as time progressed slowly transitioned to the 4:3 aspect ratio we know and use today. Great for watching telly it may

be, but for DVDs, gaming and even document-handling a widescreen option would prove much more effective – and that's exactly what we have here.

Going one better than the typical 16:9 aspect ratio of most new TVs, Dell has implemented a 16:10 TFT display (1680x1050) which to be perfectly honest is bloody stunning. Zero ghosting, zero blurring and a crystal clear picture across a wide viewing arc – components like this don't make a unit cheap, but then when you're driving it with the mobile equivalent of a Ti4200, and the panel isn't exactly something you can upgrade or swap, you need it to be top-notch from the word go.

With all the hype about Centrino, mobility and general versatility, the entire chassis has been redesigned since the 8200 model, with the docking port moved to the bottom and many of the ports that were on the sides moved to the rear. New

options such as the headphones have been relocated onto the left-hand side to stay away from the media and PCMCIA bays. The unit will even hop onto your wireless network, with native 802.11b/802.11g Wi-Fi support, due to an integrated Dell TrueMobile miniPCI wireless card.

KICK-ARSE

So, it looks great, its picture quality is unsurpassed, and it's more versatile than the original Swiss army knife. But that's all window-dressing if the guts of the machine can't back things up. As mentioned earlier, Dell is one of the first out with NVIDIA's GeForce4 Go4200, the mobile equivalent of NV28 (GeForce4 Ti4200) and combined with a 2.4GHz Pentium 4m, the gaming benchmarks speak for themselves, smashing the scores produced by the 8200 without breaking a sweat.

The mobile P4 might not have quite the same oomph as the equivalent desktop chip, but combined with the 4200, you'd be hard-pressed to find a game today that it doesn't run effortlessly. As it's the first notebook we've reviewed for less than two grand, and the best we've played with to date, we love it – it's a true gaming spec with a great display that you can take anywhere. If you can afford one you'll be the envy of every LAN-party goer in the land. **P21**

PCZONE VERDICT 94

Classy, sexy, pricey

SPECIFICATIONS

PROCESSOR 2.4GHz Pentium
MEMORY 512Mb PC266 DDR
HARD DISC 40Gb 5400RPM
GRAPHICS GeForce 4 Go4200 (64Mb) (DirectX8)
SCREEN 15.4" Wide Aspect Ultrasharp WUXGA (16:10)
SOUND Sigmatel Audio
EXPANSION BAY CD-RW/DVD-ROM/Floppy Drive (Hot-swappable)
NETWORK Broadcom 10/100Mbit
MODEM 56K v.92
OPERATING SYSTEM Windows XP Home SP1
CONNECTIVITY Dell TrueMobile MiniPCI (802.11b/802.11g)

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

NV28M, or GeForce4 Go4200 as it's known, is NVIDIA's first mobile DirectX8 chip. Almost identical to its desktop chip, the design features all of the power management and clock gating abilities that were developed to become 'FlowFX', the sophisticated cooling of the GeForce FX. Known as PowerMizer on the mobile part, they allow the GPU to be more efficient than any of its competitors power-wise, dropping down as far as 25Mhz in desktop operation with maximum power-saving enabled.

Running at 200Mhz core and 400Mhz memory, in 3D operation the chip has a 60% greater fill rate than the GeForce4 Go460, and all the shader capabilities needed for today's games. And it totally outstrips the equivalent chip from ATI, the M9.

FX5800 ULTRA-TD8X



■ Price: £359 | Manufacturer: MSI | Phone: N/A | www.msi-computer.co.uk

GRAPHICS CARD

The first GeForce FX retail board we've had in the harsh glare of the review spotlight here at ZONE is giving all the right answers

HAVING waited patiently for the GeForce FX to land in our testing lab for last month's feature, it's nice to see that within a couple of weeks NVIDIA's partners are already forthcoming with retail boards. And this issue we're reviewing the first of those cards – the FX5800 Ultra-TD8X from MSI.

As with NVIDIA's other partners, MSI is initially offering a board that's effectively identical to the reference card tested last month, with minor branding on the now-famous FlowFX cooler.

With all the goodness of CineFX and Intellisample, the feature set is much as we've described over the lead-up to the board's arrival, leaving little room for individuality between mainstream manufacturers.

Where the MSI card really does try to differentiate itself is in the accompanying software bundle. Much like their Ti4800SE, the card comes

accompanied by a host of applications (Virtual Drive 7 Pro, Restore It 3 Pro, MSI 5.1 DVD Player, MSI Media Center), none of which are going to set the world on fire. Thankfully, the games selection – *Ghost Recon*, *Morrowind*, *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project* and their 7-in-1 disc (*Sum Of All Fears*, *IL-2: Sturmovik*, *Serious Sam 2 Lite*, *Rally Trophy*, *Beam Breakers*, *Zax & Oni*) should offer something for everyone.

The MSI card employs the reference cooler design and is far from a silent solution, however, the latest driver revisions offer scope for temperature monitoring, which may prove invaluable to overclockers.

Obviously, all of this is simply window dressing for the main event, the FX5800 Ultra, so how does the retail board stack up

against the competition?

In our benchmarking it quickly became apparent that while the board wasn't going to storm too far ahead of the competition in terms of raw, flat-out performance, NVIDIA's latest offering is the king of the hill when the test systems were

configured for a good compromise between quality anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering. If anything, performance is probably closer to the unreleased Radeon 9800

now than the 9700 at common settings (see page 102 for details), and that's before any future optimisations are made in the driver (for which the company is renowned).

If you want a new DX9 board today, and a price of nearly £400 doesn't put you off then it's a close thing, but we reckon the FX5800 is the daddy, and MSI's bundle a good first offering. **[A]**

PCZONE VERDICT 91

An excellent package with a market-leading chip at its core



AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX

■ Price: £175 | Manufacture: Creative Labs | Phone: N/A | www.europe.creative.com

SOUNDCARD

With enough ins and outs to rival the Premiership transfer window, this semi-pro sound board, breakout box and software bundle should see to most audio needs

DOMINATING the personal computer audio market can be a double-edged sword – when you've sold soundcards to just about everyone, what do you do next? You could try bolting on support for a couple of extra speakers, or maybe just tack on some sort of high speed connectivity like Firewire. Alternatively, you could offer increasingly obscure audio standards, but what do you do when your last product did all that already?

You just have to improve on all that again, which as you can imagine is much easier said than done. However, if anyone can up the acoustic ante, then it has to be Creative Labs.

This month we get our hands, or more appropriately our lobes, on the Audigy 2 Platinum eX. This particular model is squarely

targeted at budding musicians and enthusiasts, and aims to give them many of the features normally associated with much more expensive professional audio solutions.

For any musician, connectivity is perhaps the most important aspect of a soundcard and the Audigy 2 Platinum eX provides for almost every conceivable option. The 'eX' differs from its stablemates by utilising a very accomplished external breakout box, which helps it to escape the shackles

of a standard PCI card. The external I/O module has a range of connectors tailored for both digital and analog devices, including three Firewire connectors, optical in and out, full size MIDI in and out and standard stereo RCA connectors.

If the sheer flexibility of the unit isn't enough to convince you of how hardcore it is, then the software almost certainly will, consisting of a stack of multimedia applications including Creative Mediasource,

Steinberg Cubasis VST 4.0, Acid Style DJ, Ulead Videostudio 5.0 SE DV, Traktor and Fruityloops Pro 3.5.

The purity of sound capture and reproduction has been refined once again, and with this incarnation of the Audigy range, Creative claims such impressive figures as 106db SNR and 192KHz sample rates.

As with the rest of the Audigy 2 range, the Platinum eX sports support for decoding such up-and-coming sound standards

as DVD Audio. Which when combined with Dolby Digital EX enabling 6.1 speaker configurations makes the Audigy 2 more than capable of turning the heads of audiophiles and home cinema buffs alike. **[A]**

PCZONE VERDICT 87

The number one soundcard for creating your number one album





DEAR WANDY

Every month our resident surgeon reads your letters and solves your problems. Think you know better? Write in, sound intelligent, win yourself £50

■ JAMES ROBERTSON JUSTICE: Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing. Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. Email Address your letters to us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

AGP DISABILITY MODE

Q I have a problem which I hope you can shed some light on. Recently I self-assembled the following machine: Athlon XP 1700+, 256Mb RAM, Gigabyte GA7VRX Motherboard, Abit Siluro GeForce2 MX400 64Mb AGP. Sound is onboard AC '97. I'm using the latest revision of the Nvidia generic drivers, v41.09, and running Windows 2000. The problem is when I select Settings from the Display Control Panel and click the Advanced button, the Bus Type on the Adapter tab is shown as AGP (PCI Mode). I'm not sure what this means. I have tweaked a few BIOS settings, such as changing around the AGP mode between 2x and 4x and AGP fast write – but I've so far been unable to affect the issue. I'm not sure if performance was affected or not, as I have no benchmark comparison machine. The only issue I am experiencing is with DVD playback. Periodically, the playback will stutter and go frame by frame very slowly. Do you have any suggestions for the AGP bus problem? If you could offer any help I would be grateful.

Andrew Whitell

A This is actually quite a common problem for PC owners, and I'd wager that the vast majority of people are blissfully unaware that the problem is even there. What happens is that Windows 2000 fails to find the driver for the AGP bus on your motherboard, and so drops to PCI compatibility (no sidebanding, pipelined transfers, 2x mode, anything). So yes, you guessed it, you're taking a monster sized performance hit. It usually happens to people who have built their own PCs – in the

excitement of ripping open cardboard boxes, sniffing packs of silica gel and caressing their new peripherals, they forget to install the drivers for their motherboard. In your case I'd dig out the CD-ROM that came with your board and install the AGP drivers from there. Alternatively, I can recommend updating to the latest VIA 4in1 drivers available from www.viaarena.com. That should sort you.

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

Q In response to Mikael le Dous' letter from PCZ #125, I'd like to point out that if you leave your CMOS jumper set to 'Clear' and then turn on your PC, it will damage the motherboard. I have an MSI KT7 Pro motherboard and have recently experienced the same problems as Mikael. The motherboard's manual clearly states not to turn on the PC when the jumper is at 'Clear', and even recommends that the mains power be unplugged, though this isn't necessary. The correct way to do it is to leave it at 'Clear' for about two minutes, then restore it to 'Keep' before proceeding to boot the PC. It works for me every time, though you may have

to time it differently. Just a friendly message to Mikael and future readers.

DC

A While MSI manuals explain that you will damage your PC irreparably if you power it up with the Clear jumper set, not every manufacturer issues such a drastic warning. Intel motherboards, for example, actually require you to set the jumper, power up, wait for the 'NVRAM cleared by jumper' message to appear on the screen, and then power down again. As always, RTFM.

IT WASN'T ME OFFICER, HONEST

Q I'm on broadband and have a firewall. I am a keen downloader of free games, themes, demos, skins and all that malarkey. At the weekend I ran my anti-virus software and to my horror was told I had Backdoor.SubSeven. My antivirus software quarantined it but couldn't repair or delete the virus itself. I set about roaming the Net for explanations as to how nasty this virus was, and several virus sites explained that someone could, if they were so inclined and had the right software, use my PC remotely. A friend, who seems more in the know than I, says that particular person may even get a small window pop up showing my desktop on their screen whenever I boot-up my PC! Given the rightly high profile, and widespread publicity of the police cracking down on Internet misuse, my question is this: could someone out there use my PC remotely to commit Internet crime? Would I know they were doing it? Is a firewall and anti-virus software sufficient?

Anthony Smith

A SubSeven is a Trojan Horse, and quite a common one at that. It offloads a small, infected executable – the horse, so

to speak – and then it sits patiently waiting for someone to come along and ride it.

To answer your question: an unauthorised user could quite easily use your PC as a kind of remote Internet gateway. They could, for example, configure your system as an FTP server and transfer files to and from it. If you have any applications open at the time of their visit there's a high chance they'll be able to dip into whatever you're working on – and even restart the machine afterwards to stop you twiggling that they're there. They'll also have access to your machine's more sensitive areas, such as



I'm not sure which is more shocking: the fact you're looking at a box of condoms in a games mag, or the fact I've pulled this gag twice now within 18 months.

the registry, and there's no end of pain if they get their hands on that. Like spam it's just not plausible to stop infected files getting near your machine, but with a decent anti-virus program you'll be alerted the moment they turn up. I'm intrigued you said you "ran your anti-virus software" – it should be running constantly in the background, flashing up alerts when these things arrive. I suggest you need an upgrade and, as usual, Norton AntiVirus gets the Wandy thumbs-up. Since your existing firewall seems ineffective – although I don't know how you have it configured – you may want to consider Norton Internet Security which combines



"Could someone out there use my PC remotely to commit Internet crime?"



Can setting the clear CMOS jumper kill your PC? Only the manual knows.

"My experience is that leaps in processing power are not as noticeable as leaps in video power"



333MHz RAM not as fast as claimed? Not exactly.

class leading anti-virus protection with a firewall. You should also power-down any services you don't need – web servers, mail servers, FTP servers and the like.

NOTHING TO SEE HERE

Q I spent all my Christmas money doing a minor but very important upgrade to my system – I took the advice of you guys and bought the Asus A7N8X motherboard. I'm very impressed with it, and it is without doubt the best motherboard I've had so far, as the performance increase is major. But all is not well and I have a problem. You see, I'm running this beast on my old AMD Duron 800. This is just a temporary thing, but I've paired it up with a stick of the latest 333MHz 256Mb DDR RAM. Great, I thought. New RAM, faster system! But according to my motherboard, my RAM is only running at 166MHz – only 33MHz faster than my old RAM! Is the motherboard limiting the RAM's speed because of the Duron? Is it putting a brake on things so the chip can keep up with my RAM? Help!

Lee Setford

A Panic not – DDR stands for Double Data Rate. The clock frequency of your RAM is the indicated 166MHz, but its effective speed is twice that, 333MHz. Let me explain a little better. Data arrives from your RAM chips in time with each electronic tick of your PC's memory clock – you've probably heard clock speeds mentioned many times before now. Anyway, this tick is continually fluctuating between two voltages, low and high, and on the upward cycle the memory data transfer takes place. When you have DDR in your

machine, however, the transfer happens both on the upward cycle and also on the return when the voltage is dropping. It means twice as much data is passed as would be with regular SDRAM. Hence 333MHz from a 166MHz chip!

WORTH THE FIVER?

Q With regard to Tony and his wasted fiver on *Transport Tycoon Deluxe* in PCZ #126, as *TTD* doesn't ship with a patch for Windows Me, he might want to take a look at the ingeniously named www.ttdpatch.com where, by some spooky coincidence, there is a *TTD* patch – albeit an unofficial one. I can't speak for Windows Me, but it did manage to get the game running fine on my XP PC, as well as supplying a whole lorry-load of enhancements to the game itself. Maybe he'll be able to get his money's worth and put a smile back on his boat race if he checks it out.

Colin Smith

A Almost worthy of top tip status, as it rekindled my interest in the game, but alas it doesn't seem to fix the fact that *Transport Tycoon* hates my install of Windows Me. So while people with Windows NT, 2000 and XP will get a whole motorway of mileage out of the patch, poor old Tony is still scuppered. That said, I must mention a URL that James Tompkin kindly emailed me: www.tt-forums.net. It's full of very useful advice about the game, common problems and the aforementioned patch.

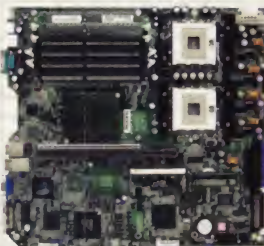
BUY OR DIY

Q I'm looking to buy a new PC. I want the best – well, the fastest – I can get, and while I am prepared to spend the £1,800 required I feel if I could

build one myself it would save money and may be even quicker? This, however, feels a little daunting, and although I am sure *PC ZONE* has run a feature on the subject before, is there a plan to run one in the future. If not, any tips you could offer would be greatly appreciated.

Paul Burley

A It's not possible for me to discuss the subject fully here as there isn't the room, but I can say that building a PC these days is actually quite easy. Get yourself a motherboard with integrated



Now That's What I Call Hardware: if I had money to spare, I'd buy myself this stunning Supermicro P4DPR-6GM+.

peripherals (eg onboard LAN and sound) and the scuffed-knuckles plumbing job that was so often a nightmare is now both fast and easy. There's a lot of satisfaction to be had from building a system totally to your own specification and without all the preloaded crap you get on many off-the-shelf systems, and you'll also gain a vital understanding of how it all fits together. Buy yourself a book on the subject – there are plenty available at your local PC World outlet. Now, if I had £1,800 to spare... I'd build myself a Supermicro-based dual Pentium Xeon. But don't get me started.

SAVE THOSE PENNIES

Q I'm looking to upgrade my CPU and graphics card. I run an AMD 1400MHz, 512Mb

SDRAM and a GeForce 3. I was looking at the XP 2400+ and Radeon 9700 but there are a couple of things I would like your comments on. Which would bring the most benefit to my gaming, processor or video? I'm looking at the ATI mostly due to the GeForce FX not receiving the high acclaim we all expected. Do you feel ATI driver support is improving, or is this an issue that should be considered further? Would a 128Mb graphics card and 2GHz chip see me through this year (*Doom 3*, *Unreal II*, etc) or am I better off saving my pennies for a new system?

Malachi Rangecroft

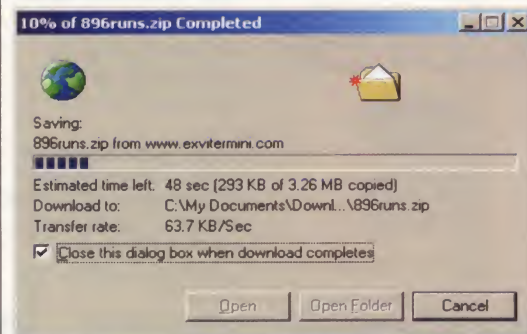
A My experience is that big leaps in processor power are not as noticeable as big leaps in video power. As for video card manufacturers, I wrestled with a Radeon 8500DV the other day and as with practically every other ATI

product I have ever used, after a while I threw my hands up in the air and gave up. Later, after wasting many hours, I stumbled across a technical bulletin on the ATI website which helpfully explained that the functionality I was looking for had been written out of the drivers – very annoying, because the same features are available on all GeForce VIVO cards. That said, I recently acquired a Radeon 9700 Pro, and I have to admit that it's a fantastic product: not only better value than the GeForce FX but more than a match for the Nvidia card in a number of benchmarks too. But as things stand, if I were you I'd keep my cash in my pocket until late spring and assess the hardware game again at that time.

Visit Wandy online at www.dearwandy.com

WANDY'S TOP TIP

BROADBAND JUST GOT BROADER



It hasn't been through Photoshop. No, really.

If you're an ADSL user, you're probably used to download speeds of 50Kb per second or more. What you may not realise is that BT recently released a network optimiser tool that helps you squeeze even more thrust out of your broadband connection. At home I've been able to get a whole 6kb per second more out of download – a whole extra modem – meaning a regular and steady 63Kb per second rate. You need this tweak! Get the technical details and the download from www.broadband1.bt.com/across_the_country/news_item16.asp?t=2

Send in your Top Tip to Dear Wandy and win yourself £50



WATCHDOG

Another month, another bag full of bile from frustrated readers who're feeling distinctly short-changed by their shopping experiences...

■ WRITING THE WRONGS Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry - we're here to help when you've reached the end of your tether. If you have a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and contact number. With PCs, make sure that you also include all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

"I was told that I would be rung back the following day. Nothing"

JASON GERMAN'S TREATMENT AT THE HANDS OF SIMPLY COMPUTERS

THE ACCUSED



dabs.com

KOMPLETT.co.uk

MICRO DIRECT
www.microdirect.co.uk

ntl:

SIMPLY

WATFORD electronics
powered by savastore.com

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

I WANT MY MOBO!

When something goes up in smoke inside your pride and joy, you want it fixed as soon as. So at the end of November, when his motherboard went kaputt while still under warranty, Colm Boorman naturally sent it off to the retailer, Micro Direct: "They said the manufacturer would get a replacement to me within 20 working days," says Colm, who instantly became a regular at his local Internet café as he struggled to do his Computing HND coursework minus a PC.

Twenty days later and nothing had arrived. Come the 6th of January and still no luck. But Colm was told that he would receive the motherboard the following day. A week later and he still hadn't received anything in the post. He was told by Micro Direct to call the shipment company who in turn said that nothing had been dispatched to him on the 7th.

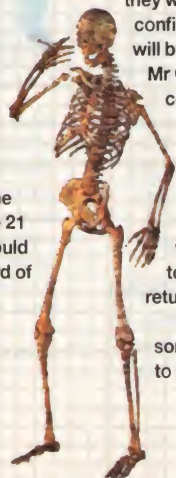
The retailer then confessed that the motherboard had not been signed in the book and so nobody knew what to do with it. "So they left it there for over a week until I rang up," explains Colm. "Yet again they said my mobo would be sent out ASAP."

Alas, Colm's still waiting for his mobo seven weeks later which, while great news for his local Internet café, is lousy news for his studies...

First off, Micro Direct would like to express its sincerest apologies for "this regrettable situation". It says it can take up to 21 working days for a repair or replacement to be sorted.

In your case, the holiday season didn't help either with the main suppliers to Micro Direct shutting up shop over Xmas. "Not accounting for the seasonal holidays, the 21 working day policy would have expired on the 3rd of

The wait for his fixed mobo finally took its toll on one reader...



January," explains a company spokesperson. "Therefore when the customer contacted us on the 6th of January, we were three days over deadline. However, a replacement board was invoiced on the 7th of January, as the customer was advised. But, regrettably, this item was found to be incorrect and was not dispatched."

Micro Direct agrees your situation was unacceptable and says it has since altered its procedures. Colm has now finally got his board back.

NUKED NETWORK

So PC ZONE goes and recommends a top network router. You duly follow our expert advice and end up with a premium piece of kit. Unless you're Jason German, of course, who had one delivered by Simply Computers, only to find that it was dead on arrival.

Jason rang Simply - 20 minutes on hold - and "was told I would be rung back in three days to arrange collection, and a refund would follow," he explains. "Two weeks passed, so I rang them again - another 25 minutes on hold - and was told there had been an oversight. I was told that I would be rung back the following day. Nothing!"

So Jason emailed Simply. But alas, over seven weeks since he first contacted them he's still had no luck: "I know it's only for about £11, but why should I be out of pocket when it's not my fault?" fumes Jase.

Well, we asked Simply what they were playing at: "I can confirm a refund of £20 will be processed today for Mr German," says the company. "This is to cover the cost of the item and, hopefully, the phone charges. He can also discard the original item, as it will not be necessary to trouble him with returning it."

Simply says they're sorry it's taken this long to resolve the issue, and



Reader Jason German checks his inbox for any kind of response from Simply. And finds nothing...

that the delay was caused by an internal problem, which has since been corrected.

A KOMPLETT DISASTER?

He came, he saw, he bought. Yep, reader Neil Haynes thought he was on to a winner when he spotted a kick-ass processor up for sale on Komplet at £25 less than anywhere else. "I bought it and carefully placed the processor into my motherboard but my computer did nothing," explains Neil.

He checked to make sure the board wasn't scuppered but everything booted up fine with his old processor. So it had to be the new processor, right? Err... right. So he duly sent the processor back to Komplet.

Two weeks later, a package arrived with a cover note and the original processor enclosed. The note read: "CPU has a damaged core, probably due to rough mounting of cooler/fan. Unfortunately, AMD offers no warranty for such damage."

It's an opinion that Neil utterly refutes: "The processor has no visible damage to the core at all," he rages. "I feel really let down by Komplet. They have taken my money and have totally disregarded my situation."

Well, Komplet isn't budging - it says every CPU that leaves its depot is thoroughly inspected: "Customers should

check their items when they receive them for any visible damage, and Mr Haynes did not report any such damage to us prior to his installing of the CPU," says Komplet. "It is therefore only natural to conclude that he was merely unlucky when installing."

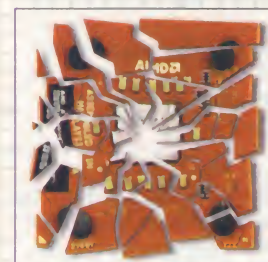
"But we understand he may feel disappointed and would like to offer him a discount off his next order," says Komplet.

Hmm, we're not so sure Neil will be rushing to order from Komplet any time soon.

MISSING IN INACTION

You place an order. It arrives. And, oh dear, some vital stuff's missing. And worse, your queries to their whereabouts is met by the deafening sound of customer service silence. Reader Stefan Szczurek ordered a motherboard/processor kit from Watford Electronics in November last year. His kit turned up but was missing a CD containing DVD decoder software, and an S-bracket.

"After a number of enquires, I was contacted by Craig Catlin of their Customer Support



Note to Komplet engineers: This is what a broken CPU looks like...

department who asked me to confirm my details," says Stefan. "He then replied saying that the missing parts would be with me by the 8th of January, 2003. The parts have still not arrived."

He has tried contacting the company on numerous occasions but with no luck. Over to Watford Electronics: "Stefan, many apologies for the problems you have encountered," it offers.

"After 30 days of phoning and emailing the company, our Clive was still waiting for *Hitman 2*"

CLIVE MEAD FALLS FOUL OF GAMER.UK.COM

"Craig, who you were dealing with, left the company around the time of your enquiry."

Watford says it has now obtained a replacement S-bracket. "There were some problems over the supply of the DVD player as it was an optional extra, but in light of the problems you have had, we have arranged for a copy of Power DVD to be sent to you as well."

You should now finally be sorted, Stefan. Let us know if this is not the case...

'CROSS WIRED'

Poor Alex Carter. He thought the Distance Selling Regulations was there to protect him and

his consumer rights when he went online shopping. But not according to Dabs. Alex bought a PSU to upgrade his system, but after installing it found that the PC instantly crashed whenever Windows loaded. "After checking in the BIOS, it actually provided less power than the old PSU and therefore was useless to me."

He thought that under the 'cooling off' law, he was entitled to send the PSU back for a refund. Dabs on the other hand was adamant he couldn't because the box had been opened. A flurry of emails was exchanged, but the company refused to take the item back or offer any kind of refund or credit.



Dabs' copy of the Distance Selling Regulations?

We asked Dabs to clarify its unique interpretation of the Distance Selling Regulations. "In this instance, it appears we may have been hasty in refusing a refund," says a Dabs spokesperson. "We have emailed Mr Carter with the details so that he can arrange to return the PSU for refund. We apologise for any inconvenience caused."

Well done for sticking to your guns, Alex. Shame it took Watchdog to get the situation resolved though, Dabs...

HELLO? ANYONE?

Meet Clive Mead, a reader who may be less inclined to shop over the Internet after

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ A VERY INFREQUENT SPOT WHERE A READER ACTUALLY PRAISES A COMPANY FOR STERLING SERVICE...

"Freeserve and BT in happy customer shocker!" Apologies to both parties for that gentle jibe, but Watchdog has seen a complaint or three about both over the years, so it was nice to get a letter of compliment about the companies from reader Scott Fergusson: "I bought my Freeserve modem from PC World just before Christmas," he explains. "Ten days after I had set it all up, I got an email from Freeserve saying I was connected."

Unfortunately, the modem was found to be faulty. So a BT engineer turned up and reckoned the plugs and cables were to blame. "That didn't work, though, and we couldn't connect," says Scott. "The following day though, without warning, a BT ADSL technician came and sorted it all out for me! Since then, I haven't looked back and my ping has gone right down!"

▼ So Scott wants to thank both Freeserve and BT for "their excellent customer service." Consider it done, Scott...

his recent experiences: "Not long back I placed an order for *Hitman 2* from gamer.uk.com," he sobbed on our shoulder. "I was told to allow up to five working days for delivery."

After over 30 days of phoning and emailing the company, our Clive was still waiting for his copy of *Hitman 2* to turn up.

We sent gamer.uk.com an email (and a reminder) asking them to explain what was going on. No reply. We only hope they read this and get back to us at some point.

In the meantime Clive, if you haven't received anything in the post, drop your credit card company a line and explain the situation to them. ☒

FROM THE MAKERS OF COSSACKS

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"A truly epic game" Eurogamer



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Eurogamer 9/10 IGN 8.2/10
PC Gameplay 8/10 Gamespot 84%



BUYER'S GUIDE

We've performed massive surgery on our Buyer's Guide to give you an even clearer picture of what makes up the dream games machine. We've got three categories for each component, giving you the Best Performer, the Best Buy and the Best Budget. If you think we've got something wrong, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk, and if we print your suggestion we'll give you a GeForce 4 card from Gainward

BEST PERFORMANCE

BEST BUY

BEST BUDGET

INTEL MOTHERBOARD



P4T-533C

STREET PRICE £123

MANUFACTURER ASUS

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.asus.com

Following the success of its Intel-850-based P4T, ASUS release a revision based on the i850e chipset for the new 533MHz FSB Pentium 4s. With support for PC1066 RAMBUS and AGP4x, the P4T-533 manages to stand head and shoulders above the competition thanks to clever board design and high-quality components. If you have to have the best then you have to have this.



845E MAX2-BLR

STREET PRICE £112

MANUFACTURER Microstar International

TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

The Max2-BLR from MSI is one of the most rounded Intel 845E packages we've seen. Based on the newest revision of the DDR-supporting chipset for the latest 533MHz FSB chips, MSI has brought in some clever extras including onboard 5.1 sound. The addition of Bluetooth allows wireless connectivity to enabled gadgets, plus readiness for a range of peripherals.



GA-8IEX

STREET PRICE £91.64

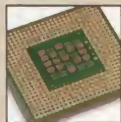
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Just because you're working to a tight budget, don't think you have to settle for second best. If you're after an entry-level Pentium 4 then you could do worse than check out the excellent GA-8IEX from Gigabyte. Along with support for the new 500MHz FSB chips and DDR memories comes integrated Creative 5.1 sound and 10/100 network plus six USB2.0. For less than £100 you can't do better.

INTEL PROCESSOR



PENTIUM 4 3.06GHZ (WITH HYPERTHREADING)

STREET PRICE £514

MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403 000

WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

As the first CPU to break the 3GHz barrier we knew this 3066Mhz chip from Intel would be fast. Incorporating a new technology - Hyperthreading - these new CPUs are capable of running like a dual-processor set-up, taking multitasking performance and responsiveness to whole new levels.



PENTIUM 4 'A' 2GHZ

STREET PRICE £149

MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403 000

WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

Pentium 4 'A' (or the 'Northwood' core as it's known) has doubled the cache of the previous-generation chips. Based on a 400MHz bus, the 2GHz chip is compatible with any of the i845/e i850/e motherboards and would be more than respectable in any gaming system. Look at the price difference between this and the top-end Intel chip on the left. Frightening isn't it?



CELERON 1.8GHZ

STREET PRICE £63.50

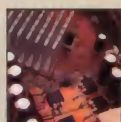
MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403 000

WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

With a quarter the cache of the newest Pentium 4s, the Celeron 1800MHz may not seem like it has the necessary guts for a decent gaming system but nothing could be further from the truth. At entry level these chips are a cost-effective way of getting an i845e/i850e system together, which can be upgraded to P4 later simply by swapping chips. It's a brilliant compromise solution.

AMD MOTHERBOARD



ASUS A7N8X

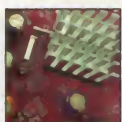
STREET PRICE £118

MANUFACTURER ASUS

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.asus.com

It's been a long time coming but everything good is worth the wait and finally we've got our hands on the nForce 2 in the form of the A7N8X from ASUS. Bringing everything NVIDIA has promised including DualDDR DDR400, AGP8X, dual LAN, Firewire, USB2.0 and other added goodies such as Serial-ATA, this new board sits numero uno thanks to an excellent feature set and blistering performance.



K7N420PRO

STREET PRICE £83.42

MANUFACTURER Microstar International

TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

As the top nForce board, the K7N420Pro from MSI beat every KT266/266A offering we put it against. Add to the great performance an integrated GeForce2MX graphics chip plus separate AGP 4x slot, 100Mbit LAN, integrated 5.1 sound, and you'll agree it's perfect for seasoned enthusiasts and first-time gamers alike. Watch out for the nForce 2 boards, arriving next month though.



GA-7TXH

STREET PRICE £83

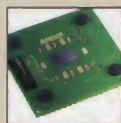
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte

TELEPHONE 01908 362 700

WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Usurps another great Gigabyte board - this one is a fantastic Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative, which is plenty good enough for gamers. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR266 boards for Athlon. A complete bargain if you're looking to build a cheap system around an AMD processor.

AMD PROCESSOR



ATHLON XP 3000+ 'BARTON'

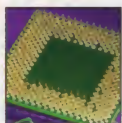
STREET PRICE £497

MANUFACTURER AMD

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.amd.com

Hot on the heels of Intel's top 3GHz part comes the Athlon XP 3000+ 'Barton' from AMD. With an improved core featuring 512Kb of cache, the new chips operate at a slightly lower frequency to the Thoroughbred B stepping. However, with double the L2 memories of their predecessors the new chips are the fastest AMD have produced.



ATHLONXP 2200+

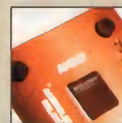
STREET PRICE £84

MANUFACTURER AMD

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Running at 1.866GHz, the 2200+ AthlonXP is the quickest of AMD's original AthlonXP chips. Boasting both Quantispeed and 3DNow! Architectures plus fast cache and a 266MHz bus speed, most existing Athlon motherboards will support it out of the box. In terms of bang for your buck this provides the best middle-ground solution for gaming that money can buy.



ATHLONXP 2000+

STREET PRICE £65.99

MANUFACTURER AMD

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Low-end Pentium 4s and AthlonXPs are now getting so cheap they rival the Durons and Celerons of this world - and that's exactly what we have here. AMD has traditionally been the cheaper of the two processor giants, and the AthlonXP 2000+ (top-end equipment not so long ago), is still a bargain even though the price has recently gone up.

HARD DRIVE



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £117

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

With your game and media collections growing every day - some game installs use more than 2Gb of your precious storage - what you need is a really big, fast hard drive and that's exactly what Western Digital deliver with the WD1200JB. 8Mb of cache and spin speeds of 7200RPM mean that this 120Gb beast thrashes all competition beating a large proportion of SCSI drives too.



BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB

STREET PRICE £67.50

MANUFACTURER Seagate

TELEPHONE 01628 890 366

WEBSITE www.seagate.com

An old favourite at PC ZONE, the Barracuda ATA IV is packed full of clever technology, which allows this 60Gb beastie to spin at the heady heights of 7,200RPM while sounding much less obtrusive than many 5,400RPM units. Don't underestimate the difference this can make. If you're still struggling with space this could well be worth a dip.



U SERIES 6 40GB

STREET PRICE £64

MANUFACTURER Seagate

TELEPHONE 01628 890 366

WEBSITE www.seagate.com

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, and find themselves replaced in the hallowed PC ZONE Buyer's Guide pages by its younger brother the Series 6. With the same specs as the Series 5 these new drives run even quieter and cooler than before, and provide what must be considered the minimum amount of storage space for any self-respecting gaming system.



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BEST BUY

BEST BUDGET



DVDRW228

STREET PRICE £225.99

MANUFACTURER Philips

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0101

WEBSITE www.philips.co.uk

If you're looking for a flexible and future-proof bit of removable storage, this is the box to plump for. It has DVD+RW and DVD+R capabilities, which provide you with up to 4.7Gb of space per disc from a 22 minute burn. It can also handle CDR/RW at 12x and 10x respectively, and the IDE installation is a doddle. At more than £200 it's not cheap but it's a competent performer and as an all-rounder does the job brilliantly.



CRW3200E-VK

STREET PRICE £86.94

MANUFACTURER Yamaha

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.yamaha-europe.com

It might not be as fast as the Plextor drive but this is still a superb buy. Yamaha has consistently been praised for making great long-lasting CD-RW drives, and the 3200 is the companies' current range-topper. The overall bundle is excellent but we particularly love its Audiomaster burning mode for cutting high-quality audio CDs – and we're sure you will too. A veritable bargain if ever we saw one.



40X12X48 CDRW

STREET PRICE £45.82

MANUFACTURER LiteOn

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.liteonit.com

The LiteOn 40x12x48 offers stunning value for money, costing slightly more than many standard CD-ROM drives. While maybe not as feature-packed as the Plextor and Yamaha it does have a few tricks up its sleeve, including Smart-Burn – a technology which assesses media quality and adjusts burn speeds to reduce coaster ratio. The best low-cost drive that money can buy.

CD REWRITER



FX5800 ULTRA-TD8X

STREET PRICE £359

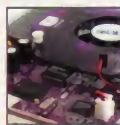
MANUFACTURER MSI

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.amd.com.tw

If you want the fastest, most feature rich 3D card look no further than the GeForce FX5800 Ultra. With support well beyond the minimums of DirectX9, NVIDIA's latest high-performance GPU beats the competition hands-down. MSI's distillation of the technology offers a huge bundle of software and utilities, and is around £50 cheaper than the competition.

NEW ENTRY



VERTO TI4200 64MB

STREET PRICE £98

MANUFACTURER PNY

TELEPHONE 01256 338 609

WEBSITE www.pny-europe.com/uk

The Verto TI4200 64Mb GeForce4 from PNY is a relatively late arrival. Coming within 20 per cent of TI4600 in many benchmarks, but costing up to half the price, it has all of the features of the quicker GPU without the dent in your wallet. Overall, we think this is the best solution if you're looking to future-proof your system without spending a ridiculous amount of cash along the way.

WAS £112 NOW £98



EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO

STREET PRICE £83

MANUFACTURER HiTech

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.hitech.com.hk

The Excalibur Radeon 9000 Pro may not be the fastest DirectX8.1 board but it's certainly the cheapest. Coming in at well under the price of the equivalent Hercules board, it sports ATI's new mainstream GPU and 64Mb of 275MHz DDR (500MHz). This HiTech board is a great step-up to playing shader-dominated games for the budget-conscious.

GRAPHICS CARD



AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX

STREET PRICE £174

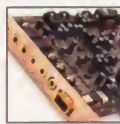
MANUFACTURER Creative

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.amd.com

The new Audigy 2 Platinum eX is a slight departure for Creative in that it's engineered a new card for its top-end product. With all the features of the mainstream Audigy2 product including 6.1 sound and DVD-Audio, a more extigy-styled breakout box plus a strong composition bundle Creative has created a product which is fantastic for both die-hard audiophiles and gamers.

NEW ENTRY



AUDIGY2

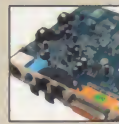
STREET PRICE £85.50

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The original Sound Blaster Audigy sat in this slot from the day it arrived, only to be replaced by its next of kin, Audigy2. Delivering further improved audio quality, though this time over 6.1 channels of Dolby Digital EX, Audigy2 is the first soundcard to receive THX certification and deliver the fidelity required to reproduce new formats such as DVD-Audio. Pound-for-pound it's the best gaming soundcard in the world.



GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II DIGITAL EDITION

STREET PRICE £32

MANUFACTURER Hercules

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

As a frequent offender on the PC ZONE Buyer's Guide, the Fortissimo II lived in the Best Bargain slot for many months – only to be replaced by its doppelgänger the Fortissimo II Digital Edition – which adds 5.1 for your DVDs and an even better software bundle.

SOUNDCARDS



INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER V3.0

STREET PRICE £37

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Probably the cheapest upgrade you can perform, but if you're playing with a rubbish mouse it could give you the biggest performance increases. Hardcore gamers love the Intellimouse Explorer v3.0, and we have to agree that it's the best ball-less rodent out there. With improved optical sensors, a better shape and even more responsive buttons it's in a word – fragtastic.



MX500

STREET PRICE £32

MANUFACTURER Logitech

TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127

WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Microsoft might dominate the mouse market but it hasn't got everything its own way. The MX500 is one of the most interesting mice we've seen for a while now. The left and right buttons are hidden – being integrated into the upper shell of the body and on top of the fourth and fifth buttons. There are two either side of the wheel to assist scrolling, plus one that emulates Alt-Tab. Very handy.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £27

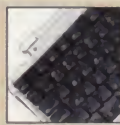
MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

For gamers who don't need five buttons and a portable back-scratcher on their mice, we present the Optical Mouse Blue. With all of the high-tech optical wizardry of the other Microsoft mice, this funky blue three-buttoned offering is extremely comfortable to use and is perfect for RPG/RTS titles – or FPS-ers who prefer to keep most of their controls on the keyboard.

MICE



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £50

MANUFACTURER Apple

TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010

WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

While it may seem odd to have a Mac product among all this PC goodness we have good reason. Rather than fall around with 15 multifunction buttons which don't help at all in fast-paced gaming, the Pro Keyboard from Apple is simply the best USB offering out there. Quality components make it one of the most quiet and compact offerings money can buy. Remember, you get what you pay for.



OFFICE KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £27.20

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

The Microsoft's office keyboard may seem more focused at the professional market with the MS Office buttons across the top, but we found the scroll wheel and remappable keys brilliant in many games – in some situations acting like an additional mouse wheel, one for weapons, the other for items. Handy shortcuts abound and brilliant all-round performance make this our new Best Buy.



MULTIMEDIA KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £21.14

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

The Multimedia Keyboard can only be described as the geek's friend. With support for many of the Windows XP customisations plus dedicated buttons for the instant messenger app of your choice and a central console of buttons to drive media player, life doesn't get much simpler, and, at under £25, not much cheaper either. If you're struggling with a poor keyboard give the pub a miss for one night and get this.

KEYBOARDS



WINGMAN CORDLESS

STREET PRICE £34.07

MANUFACTURER Logitech

TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127

WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The PC might not have a definitive gamepad just yet, but this is as close as it gets for the moment. The infra-red interface doesn't hinder your input. On the contrary, the fact it's wireless means your desktop is less cluttered and the discreet receiver is almost invisible. Comfortable to use and a doddle to set up, it makes the grade as best performance but only by a short distance.



FIRESTORM DUAL-POWER GAMEPAD

STREET PRICE £24.99

MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

This wired, force-feedback version of the Firestorm wireless might not win any awards for looks, but its ergonomics are great. Decent soft grips with superbly placed buttons and a decent d-pad make precision control a breeze. Set-up couldn't be simpler and the rumble ain't bad either. A no-nonsense pad for no-nonsense gamers.



SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY

STREET PRICE £12.92

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad and USB. Dead simple, dead effective and at under £13 really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear. We've used them in the office for years and we've never heard a word against them.

JOYPAD



FX5800 Ultra



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HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk
Have we finally snapped? £249 for a joystick?

You could get a brand new GeForce 4 for that and still have enough change to go out on the razz for a couple of weeks. Ah, but the HOTAS is probably the finest flight stick in the world, complete with tome-like manual. For those that have everything this is the closest you'll get to sitting in a plane... If you're strong enough to lift it out of the box.



SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2
STREET PRICE £52.87
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

The Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 is a fine stick with perhaps the best, most refined force-feedback settings around. Performance is great overall, with the infra-red activation sensors in the handle. Its huge base will keep it planted on your desk and as long as you don't mind the extra wiring for the external power supply, it makes a great enhancement for any airborne frolics.



CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451 900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk
Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line, former Best Buy, USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both durable and adjustable – even the left-handed are catered for with response and accuracy both unequalled. If you're not interested in force-feedback effects (and to be honest who is these days?) this is the stick to go for.

SPEAKERS



MEGAWORKS 510D
STREET PRICE £299.62
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.uk.europe.creative.com

The Megaworks 510D is the Daddy of gaming speakers – five 70W satellites and one 150W digitally amplified subwoofer together deliver 500W of power to recreate subtle sounds and devastating explosions alike. Want to know how those soldiers on Omaha Beach in Medal Of Honour really felt? Now's your chance. Just make sure your neighbours are away first.



PROMEDIA 4.1
STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Klipsch
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.klipsch.com

Klipsch's Promedia 4.1 took Best Buy many months ago with their TXH-Approval and great sound reproduction. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers to split your ears as well as the Crossfires from VideoLogic did. Whether you're a gamer or an audiophile looking for your PC to make sweet music, these are the business, as long as you can find an outlet willing to serve them up.



XPS210
STREET PRICE £40
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

Who needs surround sound? Answer: everyone who can afford it. For everyone else, this small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set-up is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue it looks the part too...

HEADPHONES



HD600
STREET PRICE £200
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551
WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

The HD600 are Audiophile-level headphones, and unless used with a soundcard like the Audigy Platinum/EX are total overkill for most gamers. That doesn't stop their fantastic response range from reproducing every gunshot and explosion perfectly with bass so deep and strong you'll be convinced your speakers are running too. They won't obviously – you'll have sold them to finance these.



HD497
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551
WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

Replacing the HD200 Masters, which used to occupy our Best Buy slot comes the HD497, also from Sennheiser. These new headphones have an enhanced frequency response range which might not come close to the HD600, but is still pretty damn good. Their extremely comfortable design coupled with easily replaceable parts, mean these headphones could well outlast your PC.



GAMEVOICE USB
STREET PRICE £34.07
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com

When are headphones more than just headphones? Simple – when they're the Microsoft Gamevoice USB. The Gamevoice allows you to talk to your mates online as you play clan games with a handy control panel which lets you switch between comms channels. Adding a new dimension to your online gaming, and doubling as a decent set of headphones they're a bit of a bargain.

TFT



180MT
STREET PRICE £939
MANUFACTURER Philips
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.philips.co.uk

The 180MT from Philips is more than just a flat panel. An 18in fourth-generation screen with VGA connectivity plus inputs for Scart, S-Video and an RF tuner mean that you can ditch your telly and pipe all manner of consoles, TV and video kit through the one screen. You can even use picture-in-picture to watch the latest Futurama while you die repeatedly in BF1942. Classic.



SYNCMaster 181T
STREET PRICE £599
MANUFACTURER Samsung
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.samsung.com

What do you need to be heralded as our Best Buy in the TFT category? You need to boast top specs, which the 181T provides with a response time of 25ms, a contrast ratio of 500:1 and rated brightness of 250 cd/m2. This results in a cleaner, crisper picture than our previous award-winner. A good start but the 181T is also cheaper and bigger (a whole inch diagonally) which completes the perfect package.



T1620B
STREET PRICE £522.87
MANUFACTURER Sharp
TELEPHONE 0800 262 958
WEBSITE www.sharp.co.uk

Sharp's 16in T1620B is more than £100 cheaper than the iiyama and delivers all the visual goodies albeit on a smaller display area. Delivering 1280x1024 on a digital 75Hz, this screen will make your games look great while allowing you to reclaim some desktop real estate from large lumbering CRTs. If TFTs aren't quite affordable yet, this proves that the day isn't far away.

MONITOR



GDM-FW900
STREET PRICE £1,139
MANUFACTURER Sony
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.sony.co.uk

Do you remember the day when PCs used to ship with 14in screens? Pah. The gigantic 24in GDM-FW900 from Sony has to be seen to be believed. Costing almost double that of the iiyama Vision Master Pro 512, you'd expect something special and that's exactly what you get. Supporting nutty resolutions such as 2304x1440 at 80Hz, you can be sure this ultra-flat screen will deliver a rock-solid picture at all times.



VISION MASTER PRO 512
STREET PRICE £527.27
MANUFACTURER iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a smaller viewable area than suggested – 20in instead of 22in, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048x1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. There's also a four-port USB hub and integrated speakers which are OK for Windows, but may be tinny for games or music.



720P 17-INCH CRT
STREET PRICE £116.32
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360 400
WEBSITE www.hansol.co.uk

For the budget-conscious gamer Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it does 1280x1024 at an excellent 85Hz (and for those mad enough, 1600x1200 at 75Hz). Focus is tight and the picture sharp, and considering you're paying a little over £100 there's not a lot that will touch this for the money. If you've still got a 15in monitor, consider yourself rebuked.

MP3 PLAYER



APPLE IPOD
STREET PRICE £388 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/ipod

With all of the styling of their desktop systems, the iPod caused a few dropped jaws for looks alone. Packing a 20Gb hard disk and speedy Firewire interface, the new models are finally Windows-compatible and come with excellent headphones and a tiny little inline remote control that means you don't have to keep fishing it out of your pocket to change tracks or up the volume.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
STREET PRICE £330 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

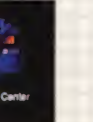
While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. Sound is fantastic but as with a lot of other players on the market, the bundled headphones are shite.



MUVO
STREET PRICE £67
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers), and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

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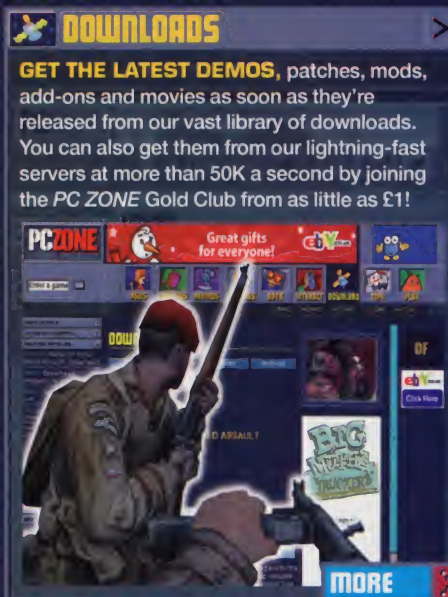
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GAME FOR IT?



■ CAREERS ADVISER Rhianna Pratchett

▲ At least once every couple of weeks I get asked about how to break into the glamorous world of games journalism. There seem to be simply hundreds, if not thousands of you out there who are just desperate to be overworked, underpaid and trying to get *Taxidermist Tycoon* to work on a computer twice the age of your grandmother.

Which is precisely the reason why I've compiled a guide to becoming a videogames writer on page 122, where you can read the collected wisdom of the team on the nature of the job and how to get into it in the first place.

And if you become a journo you'll find out that timeless classics are hard to find. In my opinion, *Monkey Island* is still the definitive adventure game of all time, imbued with both great gameplay and genuine humour, and we've all come to realise over the last few years what rare commodities those are.

We may have high hopes for *Sam & Max 2*, but *Monkey Island* will always be our first adventure gaming love. Hence we unleashed Paul Presley to track down those behind the legend, the results of which are on page 142. Among other things, he talks to them about the creation of Guybrush and the use of rubber chickens, as well as clinging to their ankles and begging them to make more adventures before the genre is lost forever.

Leading The Assault



Medal of Honor: Spearhead gets the treatment

■ www.ea.com/eagames/official/moh_alliedassault/home.jsp



MEDAL OF HONOR: Allied

Assault has been a raging success in the home development community, with mappers and modders alike happy to dig into the code and see what tweaks they can make to the shining formula. And once the expansion came out, it was only a matter of time before EA unleashed the *Spearhead* software development kit (SDK) into the *MoH* community's grubby mitts, energising them once more.

The SDK itself includes all the files necessary to start editing your own *Spearhead* modification, as well as detailed tutorials on how to get started and where to go from there. You'll also find some tools to make your life easier if you're not a great fan of using proprietary editors. That time is now upon us, and on this month's disc you'll find not only the *Spearhead* SDK, but a collection of the best the gaming community has to offer in the way of gameplay tweaks and add-ons.

First up, then, is the *Medal Of Honor* Ultipack from The_Bondsman. Featuring more than 70 skins covering both sides, the Ultipack also includes a blood mod and a grenade mod to tweak the experience slightly, without holding back on the carnage. We've also included the Map Assault 2002 map pack, consisting of 13 maps taken from the finals of a German mapping competition. We think you'll agree that they're some of the best maps out there for *Medal Of Honor*.

With news of a PC sequel to *MoH: AA* this month, the mod community should be enough to keep you going until the time comes to fork out another £40 for EA's next masterpiece.



There are times you should hide, this being one of them.



Shame you can't get in and fly those Stukas.

"It was only a matter of time before EA released the *Spearhead* SDK into the mitts of the mod community"

CHEATS AHOY!



The old Cheat Master section of these pages may be dead, but we haven't buried it completely. Check out our cover discs where the art of cheating is still very much alive and kicking. You can find all the latest cheats for your favourite games under CheatStation in the Extended Play section of the discs.

This month we've got everything you need to cheat your way through *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*, *Highland Warriors*, *Run* and *No One Lives Forever 2*. You can also find details for *Arx Fatalis* in Extended Play on the discs. And in case you're in any doubt, just remember: those who can, do... those who can't, cheat. It's the only way.



THE GUIDE
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DISC PAGES
What's in store this month?



FIGHT CLUB
Can you whup the ZONE boys?

Feel The Wheel

Good news for all *UT 2003* players – someone has invented the wheel

■ www.unrealza.co.za/shrimp/mods/unwheel

WHAT BETTER way to tour the beautiful *UT 2003* engine than by being strapped in to the latest in virtual vehicles courtesy of the *UnWheel* team. "The idea behind *UnWheel* is not to create the ultimate racing game, or the 4x4 simulation with the best physics, or to specialise in any one area as do other modifications and games," claims the mod's chief developer Kenneth 'Shrimp' Watson. "We simply want to create an assortment of gametypes and vehicles with the focus on fun driving, whether it be racing, rallying, or simply freestyle driving."

As well as the five trucks and five cars the team is currently designing using the Zmodeler editor, the team are hoping to implement a feature that gives players the opportunity to customise their own vehicles to suit the terrain of particular maps. And what with new maps on the way too, this should be a mod fit for every driving fan's collection.



This racing mod means you'll not tyre of *UT 2003* in a hurry. God, just fire me.



Monkey Strike is evolving nicely. Ook!

Monkey Strike

■ www.monkeystrike.com

AFTER MONTHS IN development, *Monkey Strike* is starting to look more like a game and less like a daft idea. It's been billed as a cartoon version of *Counter-Strike*, with the emphasis on fun, coconuts, cheery graphics and, as the name would suggest, monkeys. Six simian classes and three game variations are available, together with weapons that range from a banana-firing crossbow to an arse-happy skunk.

With increasing numbers claiming they no longer enjoy *Counter-Strike* and persist with it merely because they are addicted, this could mean a remedy for thousands of junkies. Look out for our *Monkey Strike* server soon.

GTA III

ON THE DVD ■ www.gameforums.be/gta3mta/

A HUGE CITY populated by thousands of pedestrians and blocked up with traffic was a revolutionary development brought to us by Rockstar's *GTA III*. When it came to PC, rumours spread of multiplayer modes and online play that had us drooling. Unfortunately, when the time came, Rockstar simply couldn't fit in the time for the extra mode, and we were left praying for the mod community to kick up a stink and make their own unofficial multiplayer mod using the existing code. Thankfully, the *GTAIII:MTA (Multi Theft Auto)* team has come through, and multiplayer felonies are a reality at last. For added nostalgia the original *GTA* can be downloaded from www.rockstargames.com/classics.

Shadows Of Winter

■ www.planetdungeonsiege.com/shadowsofwinter

SINCE GAS POWERED Games released the *Dungeon Siege* engine last year, there's been a fair few mods – or Siegelets as they've been nick-named – in development. One of the most impressive endeavours is *Shadows Of Winter* by the Electrofiction team. Single-player only at the moment, the team is hoping to build in a multiplayer mode at a later date.

There's no doubt that *Shadows Of Winter* is an ambitious undertaking, especially as the makers claim that none of the monsters in the original game will be in the mod. But judging by the quality of the concept art, and the fact that the team is even providing a load of original music, we've got high hopes for an impressive debut.

SHORTS

C&C GENERALS PATCH



ON THE DVD Courtesy of those dedicated operatives at EA, we bring you the latest multiplayer patch for *C&C Generals*, which fixes a number of bugs in the multiplayer game. Unfortunately, a patch for the many single-player bugs has yet to be sighted, but hopefully they'll target solo gamers next issue.

WE WILL ROCK YOU



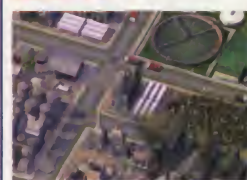
If you're fed up with FPSs full of gun toting, muscle-bound heroes, then today really isn't your lucky day, because here comes *Will Rock* (cue Guns 'n' Roses riff). He's big, he's part man, part Titan. He's got glowing eyes and he's really pissed off. Check him out on his new website www.will-rock.com.

YOU ONLY PATCH TWICE



ON THE DVD Spice up the tasty Miss Archer with the latest *No One Lives Forever* 1.3 patch, which includes Deathmatch and Doomsday multiplayer modes. The latter involves gathering a team of UNITY operatives and preventing H.A.R.M. from finished and activating the deadly Doomsday device. Plus there's the latest map pack jam-packed with multiplayer maps.

SIM CITY 4



The first full patch for *SimCity 4* is here at last and for all our ATI-powered readers you'll be happy to know that with this patch your problems should be fixed. As well as fixing hardware issues, bugs such as the capacity issues at Recycling Centres have been fixed so everything is now running as it should be.



Inner-city banger racing.



I wouldn't mind besieging her dungeon.

THE GUIDE: HOW TO BREAK INTO GAMES JOURNALISM

Rhianna Pratchett guides you through the murky world of games journalism



Job security? High wages? Reasonable working hours? If any of these are important, maybe games journalism isn't for you.

IMAGINE the scene. It's deadline day. You're typing furiously. Your production editor is screaming at you for copy. Your editor is screaming at you for copy. And everyone else is just screaming. Suddenly an email lands in your inbox. It goes something like this: "Hello. I was wondering if U need 2 have someone review games 4u. Im better than my friends at games and like *Half-Life* Max Pain Dice eX etc. I understand graphics and memory too. PS your mag R0x!!" Right click, delete. Literally seconds later the phone rings.

"Er, I read your mag, right, and, er, I wondered if you could er, give me a game to review?"

"Who's this?"

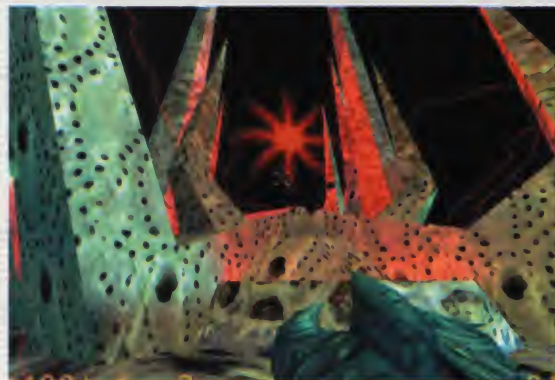
"It's John"

"John who?"

"John Simmons"
"Riiiggghht – and you want to write for the magazine?"
"Yeah, so are you going to give me a game?"
"Tell you what, send in your

CV and some of your work."
"OK, Bye."
Phone is slammed and a torrent of expletives fills the air. Unfortunately, I'm not joking. Most of us get mails and calls

like that on a weekly basis. Rude, abrasive, inaudible, unfathomable and guaranteed to make you never hear from us again. Ever. But since we like to nurture new talent, we're going to tell you how to do it right.



You need to know about more games than just *Half-Life*.

SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW?

When you flick through the pages of *PC ZONE* and dream of joining the hedonistic world of computer games journalism, do you really know what you could be letting yourself in for? "We get so many work-experience kids coming here who think games journalism is just about playing games," says Martin Korda, who himself started on *ZONE* on a work-experience placement before progressing on to be the

chief whipper of many a wide-eye young innocent. "They always leave disappointed, never come back and end up being so demoralised about the fact their dream job wasn't what they hoped, that they end up doing something crazy like becoming an accountant."

THE MYTH VS THE REALITY

First off, there are a few popular games journalism myths we need to clarify before you consider warping your fragile minds beyond all recognition.

MYTH 1 Games journalism involves playing games all day.

REALITY Probably the biggest myth. No job, with the exception of gutting chickens, is about doing just one thing. As a staff member on any games magazine, aside from reviewing games, you'll be expected to deal with enquiries, keep in contact with PRs, interview developers, answer the phone and make tea. Until you reach editor, at which point you'll spend most of your time on the phone, shouting at PRs.

As a freelancer, you can in theory choose how much time you spend playing a game. But if you don't deliver decent copy by a certain time and date, you'll find that your work dries up quickly. Most magazines have it in their policy to fine freelancers for every day they're late with copy. It sounds draconian (some freelancers have actually ended up being so late with copy that they've actually owed us money), but until you've spent all day trying to track down a rogue freelancer who's two days late with their copy and has subsequently gone to ground, turning off all methods of communications, you don't





You're not going to get to pick and choose the games you review. For every *Neverwinter Nights* expect a *Tycoon* game as well.

know the meaning of frustration. And if you read our top-ten best freelance excuses in last issue, you'll realise that they try every trick in the book.

MYTH 2 Games journalism is a well-paid 9-to-5 job.

REALITY We'd like to know who started this rumour so we can chin the bastard. Compared to many areas of the media, games journalism is fairly poorly paid. You can expect to earn in the region of £10,000 – £14,000 for an entry-level job such as editorial assistant. On which side of the line you fall will depend on factors such as location (generally publishers within London pay better) and experience.

One of the minor perks is that the job rarely starts at 9am, and you'll often find yourself starting at the far more respectable time of 9.30am, even 10am if you're especially lucky. The downside to that is your days tend to end later – anything up to 2am during deadline! Pizza during these times isn't unheard of. Overtime pay sadly is.

MYTH 3 You get to choose what you review.

REALITY For most freelancers, no – you get what you're given, although it's usually within your

specialist genre(s). However someone has to do the dodgy tycoon and sim games of this world, and as a newcomer it's most likely to be you. Popularly, these are given to work experience kids when we've lured them into the office with the promise of all the doughnuts they can eat. It's a baptism of fire, but if you can write a good review of *War And Peace* and *General Election*, you can review just about anything.

MYTH 4 You get to travel the world.

REALITY To a certain extent, yes. But for every warm and sunny LA press trip there are at least half a dozen rainy afternoons in Milton Keynes. I went on my first press trip to a *Quake III* tournament in Dallas in my second week on the job. I found out while I was coming back from a press event round the corner from the office. It's swings and roundabouts. The pinnacle of every games

journalist's travel opportunities is usually US industry show E3, primarily because it takes place somewhere warm and lots of people buy you drinks. Those Milton Keynes afternoons really make you assess your priorities.

SOFTLY, SOFTLY

Unfortunately, there isn't one magical foolproof route into games journalism. From the experience of the ZONE crew it's much the same as any other job – a combination of perseverance, good mates, blind luck, blood, sweat, tears and beer. Some of us have got in through answering job ads or work experience, others have had friends in the right places who've drip-fed them freelance.

Many people ask about qualifications and the simple answer is A-levels are a must and education to degree level is preferred. The type of A-levels/degree you take is entirely up to you, but generally subjects that are predominantly essay-

based such as English literature or history will teach you how to structure and hone your writing technique, while subjects such as media or communications studies will give you more of an insight into the media industry as a whole.

The two most obvious routes towards getting your name in print are through specific job applications and freelance, which we'll look at next.



WEB WATCH

HOW TO TACKLE THE INTERNET BEAST



Writing for a website can be a great way to break into games journalism, though not all sites pay their freelancers.

This guide is focused predominantly on print-based journalism, but with more websites gaining respected status within the industry – and, more importantly, actually employing full-time members of staff and paying their contributors – web journalism can't be ignored as a career or freelance option.

The techniques for approaching editors and scoping for freelance on websites are basically the same as for magazines, although you should be even more aware that the people you're approaching will be tied up with weekly, even daily deadlines. For that reason the site operators will be looking for writers than can provide them with snappy, well-written content on a regular basis. Even if websites don't pay, they can still be an excellent training ground in helping you learn to produce copy on a regular basis, work on your writing style and get established in the industry.



Martin and Anthony soak up the sun in LA, and Steve Hill's childhood dream becomes reality.



Forget *Band Of Brothers*, this kind of camaraderie is rarely seen outside the office of PC ZONE.

I REALLY LOVE GAMES...

"I've seen so many letters that start off the same way, saying how much they love games and how long they've been playing games for," claims Dave Woods, a man who's seen more than his fair share of job application letters. "I know full-well that I did it, but I wouldn't advise it because it doesn't make you stand out. We look for people with a chatty style that doesn't need much work. We're so busy on the day-to-day mag that it's not possible to spend a lot of time with someone unless you know they've got a particular talent."

The two most important things you need to have nailed

down before you put the stamp on your job application is a good knowledge of your prospective employer and a fluid, coherent writing style. "Keep pestering people and practising your writing," advises Dave. "Get anyone to read it and give you suggestions. If you're a good enough writer and know your subject, you'll always get work. Be confident about yourself – this will come through immediately."

Glean a thorough knowledge of the publication – including the things that you particularly like or don't like about it – and a writing style you're happy with. Then use these to your advantage. Make sure you keep your letter to one sheet of A4 paper only,

as the person reading it probably won't have too much time on their hands. And include a clear CV. Tailor your letter to the style of the publication – if it's a light and chatty magazine, make sure your letter is light and chatty. Don't be generic, try and find some creative way of making your letter stand out. If you've got access to a layout programme, try and layout your sample reviews in the style of the magazine and help the person reading envisage your name in their publication.

FREELANCE A GO-GO

Editorial staff placements on magazines are few and far between. A slightly easier way of getting hands-on experience is

TOP TIPS

HELPFUL HINTS FROM THOSE WHO KNOW

"Don't rely on websites as your entire source of income, as they tend to go belly up more regularly than magazines. Check out more general sites such as the BBC or national newspapers, as many of them have dedicated games sections." *Maura Sutton* (freelancer on *Computer & Videogames* magazine)

"Always invest in your knowledge, reputation and quality of work. You are only as good as your last piece of work. Word of mouth counts for a lot in such a small industry." *Paul Davies, C&VG*

"Don't do it. The industry is corrupt and soulless and you'll be stealing bread from my mouth, you upstart little bastards." *Mark Hill*

"Use a spell checker and brush up on your grammar. Go at it naturally and don't try too hard to be funny – it's easy to spot someone trying too hard." *Phil Wand*

"Play as many games as possible. You should know everything from *Pong* and *Defender*, up to *Doom* and *Halo*, including the dynamics they brought to the evolution of games." *Mark Eveleigh*


"Try and be professional, it's a serious multi-billion pound industry. Be honest and stick to deadlines." *Keith Pullin*

through freelance. Again, many of the techniques already talked about can be applied to searching for freelance. Emails and phone calls are always good preparation for sounding out whether a publication would be interested in viewing your work. They will usually ask for samples of your writing (even if it's just to get you off the phone) so it's essential to have a few test reviews ready to go. If there are other parts of the magazine that you're interested in writing for, then come up with some ideas, clearly plan out how you might tackle features or walkthroughs

that adhere with the editorial style. Find out a time when they're least busy (usually at the start of an issue) and follow it up with a phone call to politely ask for feedback.

Once you get the opportunity to review a game, don't squander it. "One of the most important things is to always hand your work in on time," says news editor turned freelancer Mark Hill. "Even if you're not a great writer you might still get work if you're very reliable. A genius who hands stuff in two weeks late won't last very long."

Whether you're snapping at our heels for staff positions on a magazine, or scouting out the territory for possible freelance, use common sense and diplomacy above anything else. The people you're getting in contact with are extremely busy, probably stressed and certainly not in the mood to talk to someone who doesn't really know what they want or how to go about getting it. The world has more than enough accountants and not enough good games journalists, so even

though the door may appear firmly shut, it's always ajar for the right person at the right time. 

ROUGH RIDE

IT ISN'T ALL FUN AND GAMES



"The first commission I received was from a mate. I was so excited that I ripped into the jiffy bag only to be presented with meaningless drivel. In one week I had to find ten graphics cards and rate them for a buyer's guide (I didn't even know what a graphics card was). I went

back to bed and stayed there all day, thoroughly depressed and frightened. The bastard." *Dave Woods looks back in anger.*



"Be prepared for the fact that people will change your words after you've submitted them. When reviewing *Die By The Sword*, my opening paragraph went something along the lines of, 'This game has more blood and guts than a rooftop trampoline competition at a psychiatric hospital,' and the sub-editor chopped it. I was heart-broken. And, indeed, still am." *Phil Wand is a bitter man.*



"Once I started full time, I was subjected to endless humiliation over tea duties by the then editor Chris Anderson, who would wave his mug at me and sing my name in a high pitched voice every five minutes. Then Dave and Richie joined in. Wanting to make a good impression, I said nothing. However, they soon stopped when they realised I was pissing in their coffee. Only joking lads, it was just the tea – coffee was a whole different proposition." *Why Martin Korda isn't asked to make the tea any more.*



Working for a games mag can be extremely dangerous.





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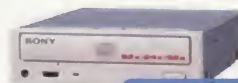
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THE MODSQUAD

Tony Lamb's monthly mod munificence...



T2DEF picks up right where episode one left off.



The Kamov is a worthy adversary.

TODESANGST 2

ON THE
DVD

SIZE 75Mb REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life

■ www.planethalflife.com/todesangst/

SINGLE-PLAYER

IT'S SOME 18 months since the original *Todesangst* earned a thumbs-up in these hallowed pages, and the intervening time has obviously been put to good use because here we are with *T2DEF* – *Todesangst 2 Der Echte Fiend* (the real enemy) – which provides even more in the way of single-player thrills and spills, and yet more insight into the original story (which, incidentally, if you haven't already played you

should go and download now). Amazingly, *Half-Life* is now some four years old and *T2DEF* is a real testament to how much of a grip *HL* and its family of mods have on the gaming community.

What *T2DEF* offers is a highly enjoyable outing with the player again taking on the role of Gordon Freeman, this time in conflict with a shadowy anarchist organisation called Schwarzgeist (one of whose less pleasant members was Dr

Newell in the original mod). Schwarzgeist has infiltrated Black Mesa, and Gordon has to sort them out. There are more than 30 new maps with minimal carry-over from *Todesangst1*, plus new characters and weapons too. These range from a hatchet that replaces the standard-issue crowbar (which can even be thrown – with a bit of practice it's very effective) to no less a beast than a Kamov KA-50 helicopter

that will pop up at the most inconvenient times to try to take you out. With chainguns, 30mm cannon, rockets and even heat-seeking missiles, this evil-looking helo is not to be taken lightly. It's a masterful creation and one of the best nasties in any mod around, which just goes to show how much effort has gone into this.

What does let *T2DEF* down is the wooden (and occasionally

almost inaudible) voice-acting and the length of some of the cut-scenes, which will reduce all but the most patient gamer to tears. These, however, are small complaints when faced with what is otherwise a well-made mod, and definitely a must-have for *Half-Life* fans.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **85**
One of the best

UNREAL BADLANDS v1.00

TOTAL
CONVERSION



Yeah? Well, and you, and the horse you rode in on...

ON THE
DVD

SIZE 78Mb REQUIRES Full version of Unreal Tournament

■ www.unrealbadlands.com

UNREAL *Badlands* takes us back to the wild old West. A land of grizzled, gun-toting men, tobacco-chewing women and nervous cattle. A land where they shot first and asked questions later (so no change there then). It's a total conversion for *Unreal Tournament* with no skimping on detail, and while this early release is short on maps, it's still very impressive. The weapon types are a roll call of American history – the Colt Peacemaker and Sharps Plains rifle to name but two – and their effects and usage have been

well researched. So too have the pros and cons of various gameplay elements, and while you can pick up health boosts and limited armour, there's no weapon spawning – so no reason to hog a particularly weapon-rich part of a map. The weapon loadouts show a lot of thought too, and there's usually a balance between hitting power, ammo storage capability and reload time.

What remains to be seen is whether this mod's niche appeal will prove attractive enough to hold a captive audience. The fun

element is there, as is the excellent gameplay and professional appearance, but is the 'western' genre trendy enough? Let's hope so. *Badlands* benefits from the parent games' great looks, bot support and user-friendly online capabilities. And even if you can't find a game online you can frag bots to your heart's content. Not a bad mod, by any means.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **81**
Dig out yer spurs...



Nobody picks up the soap in here.

UT JAILBREAK III GOLD + GOLDMAPS PACK

ON THE
DVD

SIZE 26Mb + 42Mb **REQUIRES** full version of *Unreal Tournament*
■ www.planetjailbreak.com

THE JAILBREAK

gametype is an oldie now – you frag your enemies to send them to jail, while simultaneously avoiding being fragged yourself and trying to release any imprisoned fellow team-members – but this *Unreal Tournament* version of the game takes the whole thing to new levels of excellence with a great map-pack and many new features to keep fans happy. These range from the ability to make human ladders (helpful to reach escape routes out of

prison), a Llama detector to spot players who quit when in prison and try to rejoin as a free combatant (they glow to signify their Llama-ness so they can be persecuted) and even special death scenes to show the execution of an enemy team when they all get imprisoned. Gruesome... but addictive viewing.

UT is of course one of the greatest shooters ever and *UT Jailbreak* inherits its good looks and frenetic action. The maps are top class, great looking and

full of atmosphere. This is a great mod – its longevity is testament to that – and an essential in any *UT* fan's library.



**PCZONE
VERDICT**

83

A golden oldie that's bang up to date

PAINKEEP ARENA BETA 3.0 + MAP PACK

ON THE
DVD

SIZE 74Mb + 7Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Quake III Arena*
■ www.team-evolve.com/

**PASSWORD
'feelthepain'**



Many new maps make *PainKeep* an absolute gem.

NOW HITTING version 3.0, this classy *Quake III* mod just goes from strength to strength, keeping its legions of fans happily blasting each other into lumps. This is Deathmatch taken to extremes with ever more creative ways to kill your enemies thrown into the mix. Online it's great fun, on a LAN it's a real blast. Team Deathmatch and CTF are

supported too, and add to the bloodletting options.

Quake III might not have been designed as a single-player experience, but with more than 20 new maps and the usual range of psychotic bots, *PainKeep Arena* offers a very convincing alternative to racking up your phone bill. There's no storyline worth mentioning, but when survival is the primary

concern, since when did that matter? With neat, well-designed and atmospheric layouts and superb new weapons and effects, *PainKeep* almost qualifies as a new game in its own right.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

84

No pain, no gain...



GangWars is fun, but needs more servers

GANGWARS

ON THE
DVD

SIZE 67Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
■ www.gangwars.net

ORIGINALLY a *Quake II* mod but now achieving more popularity as a *Half-Life* variant, this enjoyable, semi-realistic mod has a very topical slant in its portrayal of the gang culture so prevalent in some parts of America (and indeed now the UK). It's like *Counter-Strike* for the streets – fast and action-packed, but with a rough edge that sets it apart from the sanitised efficiency of *CS*. The theory is similar, with two teams battling for supremacy in an urban environment, but the *GangWars* team has sacrificed some realism in the name of fun and added a host of other trick features into its mod to heighten the enjoyment. This includes an

experience-based rewards system (kills earn you 'juice', or influence, and therefore better weapons), team bosses capable of healing or respawning team-mates, HUD radar to show the locations of team and enemy bosses, realistic weapons and physics (some bullets penetrate walls for example), and some of the fastest shoot-outs you'll find online. Sadly, the lack of servers is *GangWars*' Achilles heel, but those that are there are fast and stable, and a LAN game is always an option.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

75

Choose your crew...

DISC PAGES

■ **WORDS** Mark Eveleigh, Mark Hill and Rhianna Pratchett

■ **DISCS** Mark Eveleigh

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08700 711 482**. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk **BEFORE YOU DIAL...** If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

■ You need at least a PIII 600MHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 2MX 32Mb graphics card and 128Mb RAM (256Mb recommended for Windows XP users) to run the software on these discs.

DISCLAIMER

■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.

■ Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

CD/DVD Pub: Eidos **Dev:** Sports Interactive **Reviewed:** Issue 128 (90%)

As with most good things, it's been an eternal wait for the latest instalment of *Champ Man*, and you can see for yourself just how much it's changed. No accusations of fobbing us off with a data update and a spit and polish this time. The interface has changed a lot, there is a detailed training section, lots more media interaction and the tactics screen has changed beyond recognition. But the biggest addition, the one thing you'll be dying to try out, are the 2D matches. Finally you can watch your strategic decisions play out, see exactly where your players are positioning themselves on the field and which areas need most work.

This demo still only allows for Key and Extended highlights, so you'll have to dig out for the full game if you want to watch whole matches from the 2D view. But unlike the Beta demo, most other functionalities are exactly as they will be in the finished version. And the bugs aren't nearly as prevalent. You can choose from seven quickstarts: England, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Scotland and Spain. In the finished version there are 39 countries with their own leagues to play in. You can only play for half a season in the demo which, considering how tough the new transfer windows make bringing new players in, will only make you gag even more for your own box copy. But if you are unsure if this version can live up to the expectation and want to be convinced that it will be worth your cash, get this installed right now. It'll be mid-season before you know it.



You can watch the highlights of any match by clicking on one in a Report.



There are more ways to display players.



There's not much cash to spend anywhere.

WALKTHROUGH →

BABY MANAGERS' FIRST STEPS



1 Our own Martin Korda, after many years of neglecting the *CM* series, felt completely lost when he tried this demo the first time. On your first day, the players are back from hols, fat and unfit. A good place to start then is the new training screen.



2 The Quickstarts come with pre-season friendlies already arranged, so check out when your first one is then it won't creep up on you when you least expect it. Also, try to give your first team a run out.



3 After you've had a look through your players and maybe transfer listed those you deem surplus to requirements you should pick your team. If it seems too much trouble though, click on the Selection button and ask your Assistant to pick it.



4 Before your first match you'll want to have a look at your tactics, pick your captain, freekick takers and even tell each player where they should be in dead ball situations. You're ready to roll!



Watch out for earthquakes in the second mission.

DEVASTATION

CD1/DVD Pub: Novalogic Dev: Digitalo

For those who aren't great fans of football statistics, this month sees the arrival of the Unreal-powered Devastation single-player demo. Featuring two full scenarios



"Anyone there?"

from the game, this demo gives you a pretty good taste of the final game. You can interact with most objects in the surrounding environment, you can attach brain probes to rats and use them as bombs and you can generally enjoy a healthy dose of FPS carnage.

To prove Devastation isn't all about mindless violence, you're required to tap into a number of mainframe computers as your commander hands out objectives. With you as you wander covertly through the industrial landscape are two AI buddies you can use to attack or defend from a simple menu activated with the 'v' key, much like Unreal Tournament. Not like

WALKTHROUGH →

SHOW THEM WHAT DEVASTATION REALLY MEANS...



1 Listen to this woman and ask her about the laser fences.



2 Walk up to the main frame to the rear of where you start and get the codes you need.



3 Pick up the wire cutters through the disabled laser fence.



4 Cut through that chain link fence and pick your favourite gun for the combat ahead.

your inept colleagues in Daikatana, these guys won't get stuck behind doors and actually prove useful if you find yourself suddenly out-numbered by enemies.

Your arsenal is huge from the outset and we haven't figured out quite how your character manages to lug them all around

undetected as you seem to have the full military budget of the Middle East strapped to your back. This isn't to say you won't run out of ammo taking out a stationary turret mind, but each corpse you make carries some ammo to supplement your reserves.

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

CD 2/DVD Pub: Empire Interactive Dev: Black Cactus Reviewed: Issue 128 (85%)

Not content with bringing you just one demo of the fantastic Warrior Kings: Battles we've decided to hit you with a double whammy of strategy goodness with two demos from Black Cactus. (Our new exclusive one is on CD and DVD, and the older one that's available online is only on the DVD.) Each demo allows you to play on a different two-player skirmish map, in conscript, veteran or elite mode, against random AI General or against a specific Historical General from the Warrior King's world.

In our exclusive first demo you'll get to play on the Battlefields map against the might of Rashid al Din Nizari a Pagan/Renaissance General who commands a brotherhood of dedicated elite forces, spies and assassins. In the second demo, which is also a two player map, you can face down Kang the Merciless I on the Heavy Forest map, which shouldn't prove too much trouble as he's much more of a pussy than his name would suggest.

The demo also lets you play with various aspects of the game set up such

as Valhalla mode, where you can fiddle with things like the starting resources and adjust features such as the fog of war and diplomacy. To ensure you come out of the game victorious, just make sure you use the terrain to your advantage and remember the details of the holy trinity; cavalry against archers, spearmen against cavalry and archers against spearmen.



EXCLUSIVE



Check out a brand new map in our exclusive demo.

ALEX FERGUSON'S PLAYER MANAGER 2003

CD 2/DVD Pub: Ubi Soft Dev: Anco Reviewed: Issue 128 (15%)



If you prefer your footie management games less realistic and with colourful 3D graphics, Player Manager might be more to your taste than the complex CM4. It might take you a while to navigate your way through the ugly interface, but if you keep clicking on 'Done', you'll get to a match eventually. The demo allows you to play a full season in England, Scotland, Italy, France or Portugal. It may be much simpler than Champ Man, but Anco have tried to create a more personal feel with the players. Judge for yourself.



Veni Vidi Vici.

PRAETORIANS

CD 2/DVD Pub: Eidos **Dev:** Pyro Studios **Reviewed:** Issue 127 (80%)

For a civilization established by a pair of orphaned children reared by a pack of wolves, the Roman Empire did a pretty good job of conquering most of Europe, considering. The latest *Praetorians* multiplayer demo allows you to conquer the whole world, if only in a virtual realm.

The demo has a four-player map on which to pitch your strategic instincts and allows LAN and Net play. If your broadband's down or you have no mates to play with you've also got the skirmish option where you can play against up to three CPU opponents with a full range of units.

Make sure you catch as many villages as possible from the outset as these allow your Centurions to recruit soldiers for your growing legions. Once you've got enough units built up, keep a few wolf scouts handy to explore the thicker forests without opening up your troops for an ambush. As you gain units, ensure you promote more Centurions to keep a steady flow of new infantry, but if you find your army reserves are low, get demoting as this will increase the number of infantry soldiers to defend your position.

TOCA RACE DRIVER

CD 2/DVD Pub: Codemasters **Dev:** Codemasters

Reviewed: Issue 128 (76%)

Although the beta demo came out almost a year ago now, Codemasters has just released a new single-player demo utilising an 80 per cent complete game engine to produce the "proper" single-player demo. The first thing you'll notice is the huge improvement in the visuals, and the gameplay happily matches. Featuring a test drive at Brand's Hatch in a Proton Satria, you meet your future race team boss and then it's time to hit the accelerator again for a race.

Strapped in to your BTCC Lexus LS200, coated with sponsors and revving the engine you then take part in a race against a grid of 13 opponents. Full damage is featured in the demo for those tempted to

see how much they can batter a racing formula vehicle, but for those with a more realistic approach to the track, you'll want to avoid any contact as every ding will effect how your car handles.



Erm, the headlight was like that when I rolled out of the pits, guv.

BANDITS: PHOENIX RISING

CD 1/DVD Pub: Singularity Software **Dev:** GRIN **Reviewed:** Issue 123 (35%)



That's one big moving target.

Mad Max fans can rejoice as *Bandits: Phoenix Rising* brings two new post-apocalyptic car combat demos your way this month. The single-player demo sees you on an escort mission while zealots attack you from all angles. You have the choice of two vehicles and you can customise them as you choose but we recommend you gear up for all-out firepower as you'll be ambushed multiple times before back-up arrives.

Solo play isn't the only option though, as we've also got the new multiplayer demo where you can test your prowess online as waves of players take you on over a number of landscapes. Keep some mines handy as they'll annoy your enemies.



JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS

CD2/DVD Pub: VU Games **Dev:** Blue Tongue Software

Reviewed: Issue 128 (64%)



Not a pterodactyl in sight.

While the memories of *Jurassic Park: Trespasser* still cause us nightmares, *Operation Genesis* is here to breathe life into the *JP* license once more. This single-player demo features several game play modes including two missions and the Site B option where you can build your own dinosaur compound.

The missions start out relatively safe with you shooting rabid carnivores from the seat of a helicopter as they run riot

devouring your precious herbivore stocks. Then it's on to the somewhat more dangerous task of driving up to some carnivores in the act of devouring their prey for an extreme photo shoot. Problem is, a car with a photographer and ten daring millionaires is a hell of a lot more nutritious than an angry triceratops that's just stabbed your thigh...

OTHER DEMOS ON THE CD/DVD

UPLINK AND LASER SQUAD NEMESIS

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE TURN TO PAGE 119

ENTER THE MATRIX

DVD Pub: Infogrames **Dev:** Shiny

If our *Matrix* preview left you gagging for more of the next Wachowski Bros creation, this month's DVD has a whopping nine minutes extra footage and features interviews from the cast. Split into several sections our DVD-Video feature looks at how they've progressed with the game so far and how it ties in with the films, which it has become an integral part of. Without having watched the films, played the game and bought the McDonald's happy meal you'll apparently miss out on parts of the storyline, so fire this up in your DVD player for a look at what's to come.



You lookin' at me?

OTHER DEMOS ON THE DVD

CASINO INC, TROPICO 2: PIRATE COVE AND THE NEW UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 DEMO

THE REAL POWER BEHIND EUROPEAN ONLINE GAMING

JOLT PUBLIC SERVERS

Join the action and spill some blood on 600 of Europe's fastest and most popular FREE servers. Games and mods include:

Counter-Strike, BF1942, Day of Defeat, Delta Force:BHD, Firearms, Jedi Knight II, MoH: Allied Assault, NASCAR 2002, Quake2, Quake2jump, Quake3, Quake3:Urban Terror, Quake3:Rocket Arena3, RTCW, Soldier Of Fortune I & II, Tour Of Duty, UT:Strike Force, UT:Tactical Operations, Unreal, Unreal Tournament, Unreal Tournament2003

JOLT ADSL

THE GAMERS CHOICE OF BROADBAND

From 256k up & 512k down to 256k up & 2Mb down. With only 4 hops to Europe's fastest online gaming service and a ping of only 19ms* all for £22.99** per month, jolt ADSL is your route to electrifying online gaming

JOLT CLANSERVERS

Jolt is the World leader in high performance servers available for rent on a month to month basis

JOLT ÜBERSERVERS™

Dedicated 24 – 48 player high performance servers for serious clans

JOLT FORUMS AND COMMUNITY

Join the UK's most vibrant and welcoming online gaming community

JOLT CORPORATE

From a few managed gameservers to a 24/7 fully admined game server farm. Demo file hosting, Bandwidth, Leased lines, Specialist games webhosting solutions

*19ms ping time taken as an average from a selection of JOLTADSL users

**Home500 Lite option with £58.75 set-up fee.

www.jolt.co.uk

FIGHT CLUB

Martin Korda is back with tales of readers killing journalists. Yes, it's the latest happenings in the world of the PC Zone Free-For-All



See that bloke's legs sticking out from behind the crate in a crumpled heap? That's Martin Korda, that is.

MARCH 6 saw one of the most evenly-matched Free-For-Alls for many a moon. With many maps being separated by just a couple of wins, it was tension and excitement throughout. The reason for this? Well, it seems for the first time that both teams were actually using – wait for it – teamwork! At the same time!

Usually, one side dominates the other by working together, while the other one

runs around randomly like gibbons. But that wasn't the case this time around. And long may it continue.

Star Players of the Month in this latest bloodbath were Hazard, Tech0, Mas.ter, #execute//d3V, <:!2+!f\$C4!27(=|=-)nC!u!3: > (whose stupid name took me about three hours to write down while being massacred by the opposition!), Morph, Accu(>x-)Shot, FUBAR and logix. Which

means we now have three of you on four mentions, needing just one more to enter the ZONE Hall of Fame: [GM]Martin[GUN] (the one-time leader of the race to be the first name in our Hall of Fame, but absent from the action for several months now), logix, and Mas.ter. Everyone else, make sure you tune in next month to see if they make it, and if you get a mention as one of the top players of the month.

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT.CO.UK

OUR SERVERS ARE OPEN 24/7 AND FREE OF CHARGE. WHY PLAY ANYWHERE ELSE?

We've switched our game servers to the ultra-fast Jolt service, which means lag should now be a thing of the past. We've also changed the way you find them, and from now on we'll refer to them by their name rather than by their address. The easiest way to connect is to load the game you wish to

TFC Public Server #1 – [24hr 2fort]: pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27025
TFC Public Server #2 – [Neo TF]: pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27035

Quake III: [OSP]: pczone.jolt.co.uk:27960

CS Public Server #1 [All maps]: pczone.jolt.co.uk:27015
CS Public Server #2 – [Dusty]: pczone.jolt.co.uk:27025
CS Public Server #3 – [Custom Maps]: pczone.jolt.co.uk:27035

play, go to the multiplayer connection screen, and instead of typing in an IP address, type in the name of the server from the list below. They can also be accessed from a server browser such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy. Remember to use the password below, which is updated each month.

Natural Selection #1 – [1.04]: pczone.jolt.co.uk:27020
Natural Selection #2 – [1.04]: pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27020

Unreal Tournament 2003 [Team DM]: pczone2.jolt.co.uk:7777

Wolfenstein – [1.33]: pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27960

PASSWORD: **brigade**



FREE-FOR-ALL

THURSDAY MAY 1

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Counter-Strike

HALL OF FAME

Earn five mentions and you'll have your name immortalised. Our one star player so far is...

K.I.T

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

| | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Dave Woods | Kid Unknown |
| Richie Shoemaker | Zapatero |
| Martin Korda | Nameless One |
| Anthony Holden | Shokupan |
| Mark Hill | Leatherface |
| Paul Presley | I R Baboon |
| Lee Cocker | Viper |
| Phil Clark | ShitKicker |
| Danny King-Smith | Ronin |
| Colin Mackleworth | M.A.C.H.I.N.E. |
| Jamie Malcolm | BraveArt |

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

Connecting to our server has always been simple. And to make things even easier, we've given it a permanent home. To hook up from within the game, open the *Half-Life* console and type *password pczone* and then press enter. After this type *connect pczone2.jolt.co.uk* and press enter. You'll be taken right there. You can also add the server to popular game browsers such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy 3D by entering *pczone2.jolt.co.uk* where you would normally provide an IP address. Check our forum (www.pczone.co.uk) for any information updates.

LAN ROVER

LAN LORD STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL KNOWS WHERE THE PARTY'S AT

Just in case you couldn't think of something to do over Easter, I have another list of parties for you this month. Easter weekend itself has three different LANs going on around the country, so I'll kick off with those:

- 150 of you can fit into Uttoxeter Racecourse for £35 a head, between April 18 and 20. Details from www.gameon.co.uk
- There are also 100 spaces at the Wildern School, Southampton, again

between April 18 and 20. The cost is just £20 and details can be obtained from www.TheBiggame.org.

■ The last LAN over the Easter weekend is the regular LAN held in Mile End by Paddy Boy and Jim. It also costs £20 for up to 30 visitors and runs from April 18 to 20. Details: www.hgfan.co.uk.

■ High Wycombe is home to the next venue: Desbrough Industrial Park. Here, up to 50 of you will be entertained between April 25 and 27, at a charge of £20. Details: www.lantime.co.uk.

■ Last party for the month is being held in Manor Road, Barnsley on April 26 and 27. Entry is £25 a head, with space for 30 noggins in all. Details can be had from www.gamehedz.net. Incidentally, OAP's get in for free!

■ If you want to get your LAN mentioned, send beer bribes or mpegs of your elder sister to stevie@ggfan.co.uk. You have to give me a couple of months notice to be sure you get a mention.

Till next time, Scalper out.



You're only a stones throw away

WORLD WAR II

FRONTLINE COMMAND

Full Frontal War Strategy



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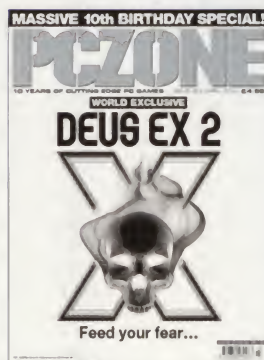




MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

■ HOLDING COURT Dave Woods



LIGGING FROM THE RIGGING

Thought I'd respond to your challenge from the most recent issue with regard to the ZONE being spotted in strange places. This pic was taken on-board an oil rig in the North Sea's 'Captain Field'. Now, I'd obviously like a superb prize to while away the long lonely winter nights (and summer, come to think of it) away from the bosom of my family. Should you not comply I'll have no choice but to cut off your oil supply, simple as that. Oh, on second thoughts wouldn't that give good old George Dubya

and his pals a good excuse to give us two weeks to give up our weapons of mass destruction or face his justified and perfectly reasoned wrath, before blowing the oil rig to kingdom come?

Brian Williams

No oil? How do you expect us to cut and paste the pages of ZONE together without oil for our oil lamps. An extremely warm T-shirt is on its way to you immediately.

ADSL

Loads of people have been complaining about not being able to get broadband because of where they live, but what about ISDN? I live out in the sticks, decided to give it a go, went for the 64K package and it works absolutely magnificently for games. I'm now enjoying sub-100 pings in Unreal Tournament 2003 and loving it. What are you waiting for?

Angus 'Banzai' McIntyre

It's true. If you want a fast connection and you can't get yourself an ADSL connection, ISDN works like a dream. But

in reality it's a fallback option because at around £42 for a 24/7 monthly connection it's slower and more expensive than the fabled ADSL.

ALLIES?

What the hell is it with publishers and release dates? We are all used to slippage, but why are the release dates scheduled for the UK always lagging behind those in the US?

I'm talking specifically about Freelancer, the long-awaited space trading sim from the Wing Commander stable. Normally, I wait until you've reviewed a game before deciding whether to buy it or not, but after playing the demo, this game had 'BUY ME!' written all over it. Now, I'd love to buy Freelancer, I really would - I'm even considering selling one child into slavery and the other to medical science to help finance the purchase.

But can I get a copy when it's released on March 4? Nope. Not a chance. Unless I live in the US. Which I don't. So I've got to wait another five weeks! Why? What is going to be so different about this country that

we don't get to see the game for five weeks?

Nick Haywood

Normally there's only a few days difference, but I agree that five weeks is a long time to wait if you're gagging for it - although we've been kept waiting a lot longer by some of our freelancers. Get yourself on the Internet and find an online store willing to ship a copy over. That'll learn 'em.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US

Your 10th Birthday Special was a brilliant issue. It was ace to see Colin 'Culkus' Culk back in one of his finest escapades. On top of that seeing Brooker, and Mallo return - both of whom I regularly used to spar with on the official forum - was enough to bring a tear to the eye.

Either way, the issue was nice and it was good to learn a bit more about the people that put the work in each month. I've read PC ZONE since the early issue with the X-Wing on the front (it may have been the first one) so it's good to see the mag



In the wilds of the North Sea, PC ZONE's still there for you.

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

WIN!
A TOP
SOUND
CARD

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new soundcard courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Audigy 2 Platinum has been firmly ensconced in our Buyer's Guide since its release, and is the best gaming card you can currently buy.



You're sick of waiting for Freelancer? Try waiting for 10 of them each month - the lazy sods...

"I'm considering selling one child into slavery and the other to medical science"

NICK HAYWOOD CONSIDERING EXTREME MEASURES TO AFFORD FREELANCER

going from strength to strength. I've just signed up for a further two years. See you at your 18th!

Andy Kimberley (KIMBO)

Congratulations on the tenth anniversary, great to see Brooker and Mr Cursor back for a day. However, your birthday clearly shows why my loft floor appears to be collapsing. The weight of



ten years and 127 issues is apparently causing structural damage. So could I ask you to please stop releasing such a huge magazine full of stuff and

umpteens CDs/DVDs on such a regular basis or I'll have to move. To a castle with four-foot thick stone floors.

John C

Cheers lads, and a big shout out to everyone

for getting us to our 10th birthday intact.

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

Could I ask why you don't seem to put graphics card drivers on your coverdiscs? I've still got a 56K connection and haven't got time to wait for upwards of 17Mb to download every month. I know you try and pack the disks with quality demos, but if I can't get them to work because I haven't got the latest drivers it all seems a bit pointless.

Matt Hill

TIME TO MOVE ON

I've been keeping tabs on your forum over the past few weeks and have noticed there has been loads of debate about *Unreal 2*. Personally, I think it's a great (brainless) game, probably not worthy of the 94 per cent you gave it, but definitely a solid shooter nonetheless.

The anti-*Unreal 2* brigade seem to have a real bee in their bonnet though, and although I can't understand why they're picking on this game and not other brainless first-person shooters, it could be a blessing in disguise. If the backlash against *Unreal 2* continues, developers might get the message – linear first-person shooters have been done to death and it's high time we moved on.

Funnily enough, the very next issue you get a scoop on *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, which in my mind points the way to the future. It looks amazing (something the first one didn't), and if it plays better than the original it could be the game that breaks the mould of the dull, unimaginative clones that are slowly clogging the PC shelves. The FPS is dead! Long live the FPS.

Trevor W

We've been following the *Unreal 2* debate as well, and although every hyped game gets a kicking from someone, it seems that a lot of you are getting sick of the formulaic FPS. Hopefully developers will take notice and go out on a limb and try something different. For our money, keep an eye on *Breed* as well as *Invisible War*, it's looking like a stunner.



Is it time for developers to try something different?

READER REVIEWS

STAR REVIEW

FANCY A CAREER WRITING FOR A GAMES MAG? WELL, PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT...

From next month we're moving your reviews to our new Feedback page (see the boxout below left). There, we'll be printing your 50-100 word opinions on the games you love and hate. So what we have here is the last of the extended Mailbag Reader Reviews, and what a scathing one it is at that.

UNREAL 2

ISSUE 126 – SCORE: 94%

We said... "There's a general feeling that Legend has kept it as simple as it could in order to satisfy the target audience."



During a couple of days of mindless tedium at the controls of *Unreal 2*, I kept thinking to myself, 'Is this really how far games have come?' To satisfy my curiosity, I fired up my old copy of 'that Valve game' (which *PC ZONE* is regularly castigated for mentioning) for a quick comparison. A week of feverish addiction culminating in me dropping a couple of detpacks into the gaping cranium of a nihilanth confirmed my suspicions: *Unreal 2* is a massive step backwards in all respects bar the graphics.

Quite simply, it is an extremely one-dimensional 3D game. You would struggle to find a more derivative, linear, cliché-ridden game in the bargain-basement bin of your local Woolworths. Of course, the graphics are breathtaking in parts, but so are the system specs required to display them, and so is the fact that after all this time in development, they appear far from glitch-free.

Legend has 'borrowed' ingredients from just about every FPS ever made (most notably – for me anyway – *The Gunman Chronicles*) and blended them together in an unpalatable soup ('Primordial' flavour if I had to name it).

Recovering alien artifacts? Giant spiders? Hovering alien brains? A laughably weak storyline? Dodgy AI? Samey weapons? Linear level design? Unskippable cut-scenes? Interminable loading times? If these all sound good to you then by all means rush out now and plonk down your £34.99. Just when I thought that games like *Half-Life*, *Deus Ex* and *Mafia* were dragging the genre into the realms of semi-intelligence along comes *Unreal 2* and just, well, drags its knuckles...

Rob Cowie

VERDICT: 65%

Updating drivers can give you a massive performance boost, which is why we've introduced the new Driverwatch section in our hardware news. This shows you the latest driver updates and if they're worth downloading or not. We also put all Windows-certified drivers on our DVD to save you having to download them. Lack of space stops us putting them on the CDs – sorry. [X]

FEEDBACK

As from next month we're stopping the reader reviews in Mailbox. But, before you cry "castration!", settle down and read on. Instead, we're going to be running a dedicated page entitled 'Feedback' in the Review section of the magazine. We're looking for around 50-100 word comments on whatever game you feel like commenting on, and each month we'll also run a thread on the forum where you can post your musings direct to the world. If you're scared of sharing your opinions with the great unwashed, you can email them to letters@pczone.co.uk (subject: feedback) or send them by post to the Mailbox address. We're doing this so that we can hear your views on a wider range of games, and also so that the original reviewer can respond to your points. Best comment of the month gets a top new game.

THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING



Little can compare with the sublime beauty of *Unreal II*. The graphics are jaw-dropping, and the absolute pinnacle of what every FPS in the last year has been aiming for, only to never quite achieve. The arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music – and even the voice acting – all exude quality. Quite simply, you can't go wrong. **PUB** Atari **DEV** Legend Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 126



MEDAL OF HONOR

It's taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of toppling *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes.

PUB EA **DEV** 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 122



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion

PCZ ISSUE 119



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a *PC ZONE* Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.

PUB Activision **DEV** Raven

PCZ ISSUE 115



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game covering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision **DEV** Raven

PCZ ISSUE 118



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 110



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Even though it features a disappointing and heavily bugged single-player campaign, *Battlefield* is one of the most compelling team-based multiplayer games ever. A must have for any online shooter fan.

PUB EA **DEV** Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121

STRATEGY

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 120



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail throughout and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere, plus it includes a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 123

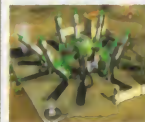


WARRIOR KINGS

A visually stunning and hugely ambitious RTS that melds the strategic diversity of *Battle Realms* with the huge 3D rolling landscapes of *Shogun*. With a compelling story to boot, no strategy fan should be without a copy.

PUB Microids **DEV** Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 114



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

NEW ENTRY The C&C series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb looking game with well designed sides that offers fun in spades.

PUB EA **DEV** EA Pacific/Westwood

PCZ ISSUE 127



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108



COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV **DEV** GSC GameWorld

PCZ ISSUE 101



Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-yr-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb and, as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.

PUB EON **DEV** Bitmap Brothers

PCZ ISSUE 101



ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWoD **DEV** Nival Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 112



WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VJ Games **DEV** Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 119



BATTLE REALMS

Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Liquid Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 111

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers.

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Infogrames DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorching of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

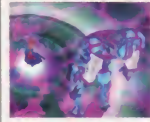
PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios
PCZ ISSUE 121



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and bearded of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



ARX FATALIS

This is a graphically beautifully role-playing game with more than a few hints of *Ultima Underworld*. Its hugely detailed and realistic environment made this a PC ZONE Essential.

PUB VU Games DEV Monolith
PCZ ISSUE 122

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubi Soft
DEV Ubi Soft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering from Japan. From the lovingly-smeared blood and grime to the terrifying use of ambient sound, it's a class act.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

NEW ENTRY A convincing PC conversion that adds tankerloads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Infogrames DEV Perfect Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 79



THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Computer Artworks
PCZ ISSUE 121



PRISONER OF WAR

One of the most original games available with a light-hearted setting and an atmospheric soundtrack, which makes it more of an adventure than an action title. *POW* makes a refreshing change from the usual mass slaughter fare.

PUB Codemasters DEV Wide Games
PCZ ISSUE 121



HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

The revamped *Hitman* engine is nothing short of breathtaking, blessing the sequel with gorgeous graphics that fit well with the refined controls and superbly realistic AI. *Hitman 2* is solid and enjoyable with a great sense of gameplay freedom.

PUB Eidos DEV IO
PCZ ISSUE 121



SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.

PUB Codemasters DEV Rebel Act Studios
PCZ ISSUE 98

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Infogrames DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA

PCZ ISSUE 87



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions

PCZ ISSUE 70

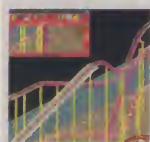


EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historical campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

As utterly absorbing as its predecessor, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* once again revolves around designing and managing your own theme park. This version also allows you to design individual rides as well as including a handful of real-life coasters. Detailed and addictive.

PUB Infogrames DEV Chris Sawyer

PCZ ISSUE 123



SIMCITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 125



MONOPOLY TYCOON

This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real-time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.

PUB Infogrames DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 110



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog

PCZ ISSUE 79



CALL TO POWER II

It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call To Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. It's still well worth seeking out.

PUB Activision DEV Activision

PCZ ISSUE 98

ONLINE

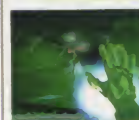
EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of four expansion packs. The latest, *Planes Of Power* (see page 72 for our full review), provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Verant

PCZ ISSUE 117



NEOCRON

It's a much smaller world than the epic *EverQuest*, but there's a lot crammed into this *Matrix* meets *Blade Runner*-style MMORPG. The atmosphere is fresh, exciting and extremely engrossing. We see big things ahead for *Neocron*.

PUB CDV DEV Reaktor

PCZ ISSUE 124



ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMORPG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, which all add up to make an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 114



ASHERON'S CALL II

One of the smoothest, most graphically lush MMORPGs around, *ACII* is also extremely easy to pick up. It's still in need of work but hopefully Turbine will be providing the community with regular updates.

PUB Microsoft DEV Turbine Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 126



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

With some of the best graphics seen in an MMORPG, *Dark Age Of Camelot* creates an atmospheric, engaging and open-ended world. The scale of battles alone should ensure it remains popular for quite a while.

PUB Koch Media DEV Mythic Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 116

DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO III



It may have taken its time getting onto the PC, but *Grand Theft Auto III* was definitely worth the wait. Offering you both traditional linear missions and a wonderfully freeform world ripe for exploring, the game boasts stunning graphics and superb attention to detail. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and we can assure you that you'll love this noisy orgy of violence and speed. Crime really does pay.

PUB Take 2 DEV Rockstar

PCZ ISSUE 117



GRAND PRIX 4

You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Infogrames DEV Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119



COLIN MCRAE 2.0

This is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* appears. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cards handle beautifully. So if you are on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 110



CRAZY TAXI

One of the best arcade conversions to the PC that we've seen for a long time. *Crazy Taxi* is a bright, colourful and in-your-face driving experience that's built on solid arcade values and good old-fashioned insanity.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 119



MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a better, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.

PUB Microsoft DEV Angel Studios

PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2 STURMOVIK



Combining incredible atmosphere, sound and visuals with possibly the most realistic flight model to date, *IL-2* puts you behind the flight stick of a number of stunningly reproduced WWII combat planes. The attention to detail is breathtaking and the easy-to-use editor allows endless months of replayability. A must-have for any real combat flight sim fanatic.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** 1C: Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 110



MS FLIGHT SIM 2002

With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight loggings and improved graphics. It might not be able to teach you how to fly, but it's the closest you'll get without paying for lessons.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** BAO

PCZ ISSUE 111



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103



FALCON 4

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Micropose

PCZ ISSUE 72



B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Wayward Simulations

PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ 3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104



RAVEN SHIELD

NEW ENTRY All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Ubi Soft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115



HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101



GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Planet Moon Studios

PCZ ISSUE 95

◀ ALL-TIME CLASSICS ▶

PC ZONE'S DISC EDITOR MARK EVELEIGH SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ON THE TEN GAMES THAT HAVE MADE HIM THE MAN HE IS TODAY



FINAL FANTASY VII (PLAYSTATION)

To date, *FFVII* is the most engrossing gaming experience I've ever had. While the random battles are frustrating and the soundtrack poor in places, *FFVII* is still the epitome of turn-based RPGs on any system thanks to an intricate and epic plot line and a combat system that has yet to be beaten by any other RPG.



SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP (SEGA SATURN)

This game is the sole reason my Sega Saturn still has pride of place next to my TV. Eight years on from its initial release, it's still the most fun arcade rally game around and shows up today's generation of rally titles with its smooth handling and pick-up-and-play factor. *Sega Rally* will always represent the pinnacle of arcade rallying.



SECRET OF MANA (SNES)

While Square was still developing primarily for Nintendo consoles and RPGs were still regarded as a niche in the western markets, *Secret Of Mana* popped up and became known as one of the greatest games ever made. Real-time combat, multi-player action, stunning visuals and clever puzzles made for one of the best 16-bit games you could ever wish for.



SOUL CALIBUR (DREAMCAST)

Ever since *Virtua Fighter*, developers have been seeking to produce the ultimate one-on-one 3D beat 'em up, and *Soul Calibur* represents the pinnacle. Combined with a great arcade mode and some superb character animations, the speed and smoothness of combat was enhanced with a story mode which added more variety to the gameplay.



HALF-LIFE (PC)

The first time I played the *Half-Life* preview code I never could have predicted how big it would become. Taking the trip to the final security checkpoint and being welcomed at the reception desk by the security guard was such a simple piece of direction from the Valve team, but so effective at immersing the player before the real game had even begun.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (MEGADRIVE)

There are few games these days that really make me go 'wow' when looking at them. Back in 1991 though, looking at *Sonic* running on a Megadrive in Dixons, I could barely believe my eyes as the blue hedgehog sprinted at near impossible speeds across the brilliantly coloured backdrop. *Sonic* opened up the world of home gaming to me.



HALO (XBOX)

While *Half-Life* revolutionised the FPS genre back in 1998, *Halo* has raised the bar for the first time in four years. *Halo* is simply brilliant, thanks to outstanding AI, beautiful backdrops, co-operative multiplayer and a great plot to sit alongside. Even the Xbox controller didn't let the game down as I'd expected, and the PC version can only be a good thing for gamers.



SYSTEM SHOCK 2 (PC)

To this day, *System Shock 2* represents one of the most chilling games I've ever played. *Resident Evil* and its like may claim to terrify, but Looking Glass proved with *System Shock 2* that soiling one's pants was possible too. Shodan's voice alone is enough to raise the blood pressure of any seasoned *Shock 2* player.



STARCRRAFT (PC)

In spite of my fondness for many of the older RTSs, *StarCraft* has to come out top of the pile even next to today's range of titles. With three races and well-balanced forces to match up to online, *StarCraft* provides more strategic action than *WarCraft* while proving to be superior to *C&C* in design. It remains more popular online than *WC III* to this day.



STAR WARS (ARCADE)

Before polygons, there were just vectors and imaginations, and when you sat in the 1983 arcade cabinet for *Star Wars*, you may as well have been sat in a real-life X-Wing. From dispatching TIE Fighters right through to blowing up the Death Star, this is the first game I remember really enjoying in the arcades.

April
2003

Port Royale

Gold, Power and Pirates

"Graphically it is highly developed with full support of advanced Ge-Force features"

PC Gamer

"The centre-piece of Port Royale are the sea battles"

"Grab your parrot, eyepatch and peg leg for the piratey trading sim Port Royale"

PC ZONE

"A trading sim with a bit more bite"
Playerofgames.com

Set sail on a Caribbean adventure with pirates, sea battles, expeditions, voyages, missions and buried treasure! Port Royale is an unscripted, completely dynamic, open ended world, set in a real historic location, with some incredible 3D graphics!

- Gold, Pirates and historic naval warfare.
- Full tutorial included to launch you onto the high seas
- Provides endless hours (easily 250 plus) of gameplay
- Set in the Caribbean in the 16th century
- Full 3D graphics engine
- Historically accurate and realistic in-game graphics
- Designed by gamers for those who love RTS adventure, trading and tactical combat

Choose your adventure

Battles at sea

Trade with the New World



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RETRO ZONE

YOUR REGULAR DOSE OF GAMING NOSTALGIA

"Toilets to flush, pool tables to play on and strippers that exploded in a shower of money"



"I'm gonna rip your head off and shit down your neck."

RETRO ZONE

JUNE

1996

Five perky girls were about to storm the world's pop charts, but *Richie Shoemaker* was having too much fun playing with himself to notice



DUKE NUKEM 3D

Holding out for a hero

DUKE NUKEM Forever. Does it exist? Does anyone care anymore? Well, after reminiscing over what was very probably 1996's most entertaining game, you may well realise that you do.

Unlike with *Doom*, virtually everyone who played shareware *Duke 3D* was happy to pay for the full version. And those that completed the free download

will well remember the painful wait for the full CD release only too well – the promise of three massive episodes, a host of alien enemies and weapons ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, and a level of interactivity in first-person shooters that has hardly been surpassed even today. Mirrors to look in, toilets to flush, pool tables to play on, *Duke* arcade machines



"Your face, your ass – what's the difference?"

to waste money on and, of course, strippers that got jiggy before exploding in a shower of money – there were laughs everywhere you looked. The perfect antidote to the unrestrained political correctness of the time and the way things are today, it's about time he made another appearance, if only to save us from wannabes like *Serious Sam*.



"I'm gonna rip you a new one."

THE BEST OF THE REST



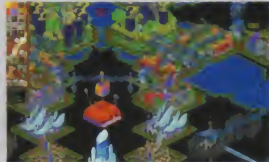
JANE'S AH-64D LONGBOW (PC)

Many fans would agree that the state of the simulation genre is in steep decline, but you can be sure that after recent US military actions in various hotspots of the world, demand for any old chopper, tank or modern combat flight sim will go through the roof. And an updated version of this classic Apache gunship sim, with its eminently playable take on techno war will be mighty welcome among them.



SPACE HULK: VENGEANCE OF THE BLOOD ANGELS (3DO, PlayStation, Saturn, PC)

Space Hulk, as anyone who's ever bought a copy of *White Dwarf* magazine will know, was a board game that was more-or-less *Laser Squad* mixed with a fat dollop of *Aliens*. The PC game, a port of the 3DO console version, was also something of a hybrid – a mix of FPS and tactical strategy where squads of space marines battled vicious aliens. Bloody good it was too, in every sense.



AFTERLIFE (PC)

This misunderstood gem from LucasArts, a kind of *Sim City of the Dead*, was very much ahead of its time. The aim was to develop the realms of Heaven and Hell, punishing lost souls and rewarding well-doers. The humour was spot-on, although much was lost due to the diminutive graphics. You don't see many like this these days, and if you did it would probably be called *Soul Tycoon*.



COMPLETE ONSIDE SOCCER (PC, PlayStation)

There aren't many footie games where you get to kick the ball in the net for 90 minutes, and then kick boots across the dressing room afterwards. If you wanted to play and manage you had to buy *FIFA* and *Champ Man*. *Onside Soccer* was perhaps the last of a dying breed, memorable mostly for its provocative ad campaign, which featured Jo Guest with her botty on show. Ironically the game was arse too.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM JUNE 1996

- Nintendo finally launches the N64 in Japan, shifting 300,000 of the things on day one, along with a similar number of copies of *Super Mario 64*. It had taken the PlayStation a month to claim similar sales the previous year.
- Still with consoles, the price of the year-old PlayStation is dropped to £199 in the UK and \$199 in the US, no doubt to combat the hype of the N64 launch. Those pesky console boys never change, eh readers?
- Windows 95 sucked, and so did the games so far made for Microsoft's relatively new OS. All that was about to change with the announcement of Direct3D, which promised to take advantage of such new-fangled devices as 3D accelerator cards. Bring back DOS we say.
- Rumours persist that Konami is to announce *International Superstar Soccer* for the PC. Eight years later...



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Paul Presley raises a mug of grog or two to the greatest adventure game of all time



GAME *The Secret of Monkey Island*

DEVELOPER LucasFilm

RELEASED 1990

INFLUENCED Although not the first adventure to arrive from LucasFilm (*Maniac Mansion* holds that honour), *Monkey Island* was the first to make a mainstream impact. Thus it can be argued its style of comball humour, subtle pathos and ingenious complexity has influenced every cartoon-style point 'n' click adventure that has followed.

PROFILE

Dave Grossman was one third of the collective brain behind *Monkey Island*. He began his career with LucasFilm with the *Monkey Island* project, having studied artificial intelligence and not wanting a career making weapons of mass destruction. During his time at LucasFilm, Grossman was instrumental in the *Maniac Mansion* follow-up, *Day Of The Tentacle*.



NAME Dave Grossman
FIRST GAME *The Secret of Monkey Island*

ROLE Lead programmer/designer
NOW WORKING ON Freelance writing and games consultancy, along with writing poetry collections

"YOU FIGHT like a dairy farmer," says the Pirate.

"How appropriate, you fight like a cow!" says Guybrush Threepwood

From: Insult Sword Fighting, *The Secret of Monkey Island*

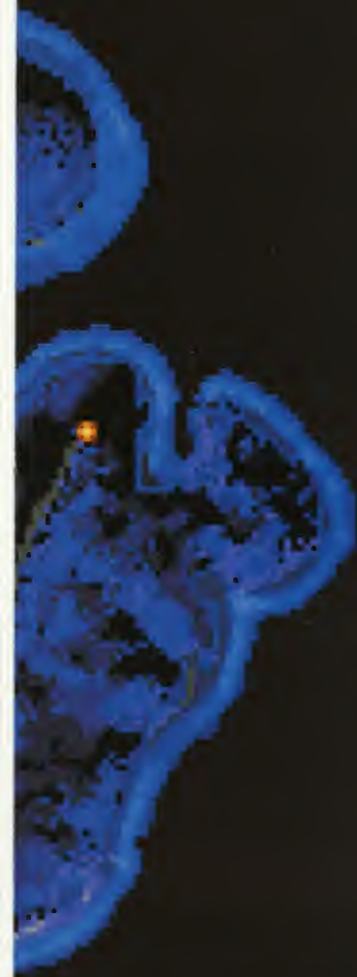
Games used to be funny. Not funny in that knowing, eyebrow-raised, ironic, ooh-aren't-we-clever-and-oh-so-self-referential way that infests so many of today's games. Just funny in that plain, ordinary, knockabout, laugh-out-loud funny kind of way. None more so than the adventure titles so regularly chucked out of the fabled Skywalker Ranch – home of LucasArts (nee LucasFilm).

Games such as *Maniac Mansion*, *Day Of The Tentacle*, *Zak McKracken*, *Grim Fandango*, *Sam And Max* and the *Indiana Jones* adventures. All classics, all hilarious (even *Indy*). But when it comes to comedy pointing 'n' clicking, one series towers above the others like a King Kong to the rest of the industry's Fay Wray – *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. Say it loud, say it proud. A true gaming legend.

"A legend? Fortunately for the health of my inflatable ego, the reality is that hardly anyone I run across in the course of my day-to-day life has even heard of *Monkey Island*," says its co-creator Dave Grossman, with typical self-deprecating humor (spelt that way because he's American). "Of course, within the games industry plenty of people are familiar with it, and I suppose that's sort of like how I imagine it would feel to be, say, one of Doctor Seuss's parents – proud of our boy, yes. But he never writes, and nobody ever wants to hear about my prize collection of antique hose nozzles."

FUN AND GAMES

Monkey Island began life in the fertile mind of legendary game designer Ron Gilbert, allegedly following a visit to Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean theme park when younger where he wanted to get out of the ride and play in the ships. LucasFilm was fresh from the success of transforming the third *Indiana Jones* film into a point 'n' click adventure and was looking for a fresh idea. Something that



would capture the glory of working at the home of George 'Star Wars' Lucas.

"Well, if by glory you mean the sort of fun but relatively unprofitable place that produced things like *Monkey Island*, I will say that I think one thing that helped us back then was that even if we wanted to, we were not allowed to build games about *Star Wars*," confesses Grossman. "The fact that we had to come up with original properties let people express themselves a lot more freely, and I think it showed." Contrast that with the *Star Wars*-obsessed, varying-quality LucasArts of today, and you could say you have a snapshot of the entire history of the games industry in microcosm.

Gilbert fleshed out his pirate idea and brought in the equally fertile minds of Grossman and Tim Schafer to help brainstorm on the puzzles, develop the story, write the dialogue and do all the million-and-one jobs that small programming teams used to do back in the day. Not that anyone resented taking on so much work when you were based in such a picturesque environment.

"The games division was only a couple of dozen people then. You knew who everybody was, and something interesting always seemed to be going on," Grossman recalls. "We worked hard, but nobody acted like they had a job. It felt more like making Super-8 movies with your friends at summer camp – and I'm sure being out at Skywalker Ranch didn't hurt that image any. Occasional sightings of snakes and mountain lions certainly kept things lively."

The atmosphere was typical of the industry at the time, even if the setting wasn't – small teams making games for the love of the craft, not the bank balance. "It was kind of like being at a start-up, except that we also had the security of actually being part of a larger, more stable, and considerably wealthy company," says Grossman. "While we were working on the first *Monkey* game nobody seemed to be particularly concerned with whether or not it made any money, which is such an unusual situation these days as to be almost completely incomprehensible."

The setting for the first *Monkey Island* game was a typical boyhood dream tale of a young scurvy knave dreaming of, and eventually becoming, a mighty pirate (at least in his mind). The player was introduced to the legend of Guybrush Threepwood in the simplest of manners.

DAINT WOOSTER – MIGHTY PIRATE?

We are somewhere in the Caribbean. It's a dark night on a rocky outcrop. A young lad enters, stage right, and approaches a blind lookout man (a taste of the humour to come). He tells him he wants to be a mighty pirate and is pointed in the right direction. Hey presto! An entire legend is born in a handful of lines and silly jokes.

Although destined to become one of the series' longest running jokes, Grossman confirms his name was an unplanned accident rather than an act of grand design, as all the best ideas usually are. "Artist Steve Purcell drew the as-yet-unnamed hero using a computer paint program, and he saved the drawing as a 'brush' to be loaded in later and used for

painting over backgrounds. We had just been referring to him as 'the guy' up to that point, so this file, which was the one from which everybody got their first look at the character, was called 'Guybrush.' People got confused and said, 'What, his name's Guybrush? That's a strange one.' It stuck, and although we tried to think of something better, the longer he was called Guybrush, the better we liked it.

"'Threepwood' came later, and was taken directly from a role-playing game character operated by my cousin, Charles. It was a couple of years, I think,

"It felt like making Super-8 movies with your friends at summer camp"

DAVE GROSSMAN
CO-CREATOR, MONKEY ISLAND





One of your more talkative companions.

before any of us realised it was actually a reference to PG Wodehouse, which is, in my opinion, entirely fitting."

Other characters had equally bizarre origins. The Ghost Pirate LeChuck, for instance, came about simply because Gilbert had always wanted to have a character called 'Chuck' appear in a game, and adding a French prefix simply made it sound more exotic.

A FANBOY WRITES

Gilbert, Grossman and Schafer seemed to be born to a life of comedy, with a script ranging from buffoonery ("You must master Swordplay, Thievery, and...er...Treasure Huntary"), to schoolboy name-calling ("I'm sorry I called you Cannonball Head. I meant to call you Chrome Dome"), to knowing irony done right ("WOW! This was well worth \$59.95 plus tax"), along with references to both the *Indy* game ("Hi, I'm selling these fine leather jackets") and LucasFilm's other biggie of the time – *Loom* ("I'm Bobbin Threadbare, are you my mother?").

It wasn't just the dialogue. The team played with all the conventions of gaming protocols. With Guybrush trapped underwater (and demonstrating his legendary breath-holding powers), the interface replaced the usual Give, Use, Look At and Talk To commands with the more appropriate Float, Bob, Rot, Bloat and (best of all) Order Hint Book.

The bottomless pocket syndrome afflicting adventure games was mercilessly mocked with a memorable moment when Guybrush pulls a giant ladder from his pocket. The infamous Rubber Chicken With A Pulley In The Middle was a classic piece of misdirection – remaining with you practically from the start of the game, queried many times throughout and finally being used in the most obviously simple way imaginable. "What, don't they have those where you live?" answers Grossman innocently when asked to explain.

Then there was the sword fighting. Naturally, this being a game about pirates there would come the time when your swash needed buckling – or is it your buckle being swashed? Whatever, every good pirate story has a swordfight and *Monkey Island* was no different. Except that it was very different. No *Street Fighter* style combos and blocks or intricate fighting routines here. Instead Gilbert and the team set about exploiting the more Douglas Fairbanks Jr elements of Hollywood swordplay – verbal dexterity.

"I remember the insult sword fighting as being a fairly tricky writing challenge," says Grossman. "You had to have something like 20 or 30 clever comeback lines, every one of which had to work as a response to either of two entirely different insults. And poor Janine Pitot, in the next

office, had to translate it all into French, whereupon many of the witty bits fell apart so she had to make up new ones."

BEHIND THE LAUGHTER

It was going to take more than a few good jokes to turn *Monkey Island* into an all-time classic, still as fondly remembered today as it was well received on its release. For all the humour, without an engaging story, dramatic



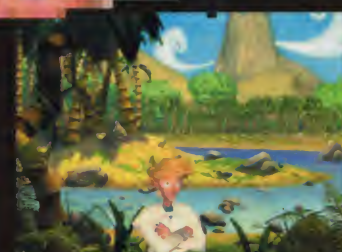
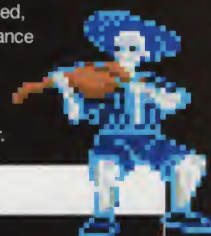
THE MONKEY'S SECRET

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE ADVENTURE GAME?

Sadly, the classic adventure game format has all but died out these days. As technology grew and the inevitable march towards the third dimension threw effective narrative engines to the wayside, the adventure game has had to settle for having elements absorbed into the world of first-person shooters. All proof of the dumbing down of our society, according to Grossman.

"Point 'n' click adventures are like Woody Allen films," he laments. "There's not enough action to suit everyone, but certain people really enjoy them. They can still draw an audience, but will have to be made inexpensively – mainstream hits are unlikely because most people would rather be driving cars and busting heads."

"Who has time to play adventure games anyway? They take forever!" he continues, warming to the theme. "*The Adventures of Sean 2*, a Hypercard game by Andrew Tegelaar. Now there's a game. It's incredibly crudely drawn, with nearly zero animation, no flash or sizzle, no production values, no nothing – just a short story and some fun puzzles. Every game designer ought to be REQUIRED to make a game without art, animation, spiffy technology or a team of any sort before being handed a big budget to do something more upscale." If only.



Monkey Island 1, 2, 3, 4: The visuals improved with time, though the games didn't necessarily follow suit, as the original team had moved on come episode three.

He has been following your direction, lying, cheating and stealing according to your whims, but draws a line in the sand here, letting you know he has his limits. So, while he knuckles under to his crew, he stands up to you, the player, the 'Invisible Puppet Master', which is a far bolder thing to do, and with this act I think in a way he finally comes into his own and takes the first step on the road to becoming a hero." And you thought it was just a load of gags about monkeys.

POST SUCCESS

"I've heard plenty of rumours like that at various times, but if anything was actually in the works it didn't get past the talking-about-it-over-coffee stage," says Grossman about one of the inevitable consequences of making a hit. With gamers the world over revelling in Guybrush's adventures, it was only natural that the team would want to take it further. Although talk of a sequel was already well under way, being so closely tied with a Hollywood force like George Lucas prompted the rumours of a certain pint-sized, *Back To The Future* star taking the lead role in a live-action film.

Not that the silver screen was the preferred route for Grossman anyway: "I was never too keen on the idea of doing *Monkey Island* with live actors – the style of humour just doesn't seem quite right for it somehow." Sequels,

however, were another matter. For many, the immediate follow up, *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*, was even better than the first. Certainly the Gilbert, Grossman & Schafer (to give them their Law Firm name) magic worked enough for it to be just as fondly remembered, although as LucasFilm became LucasArts and the games industry began to grow up, what was once an exercise in creativity suddenly became a 'franchise'. The third and fourth *Monkey Islands* had little to no involvement from the holy trinity, who by this time had decided to move on to pastures new. Consequently, *Curse Of Monkey Island* and *Escape From Monkey Island* bared precious little resemblance to the classics that had gone before.

Gilbert initially formed Humongous Entertainment in 1992, a spin-off from which was Cavedog Entertainment, producers of the much-loved RTS *Total Annihilation*. After Cavedog folded in 2000, Gilbert founded Hulabee Entertainment, developing interactive software for children.

Schafer remained on at LucasArts until around the same time, producing games such as *Full Throttle*, several *Star Wars* titles and the equally classic point-and-click *Grim Fandango*. Since leaving LucasArts, Schafer has gone on to set up Double Fine Productions and is hard at work on the Xbox action/adventure title, *Psychonauts*.

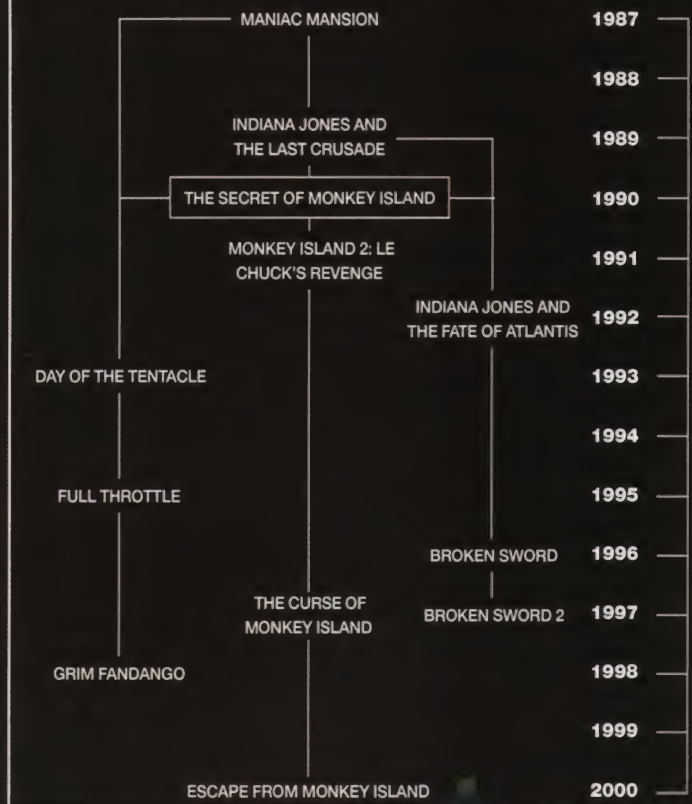
As for Grossman, writing, poetry and consulting work have kept him nice and busy since leaving – mostly working alongside Gilbert at Humongous and Hulabee.

So what of future *Monkey Islands*?

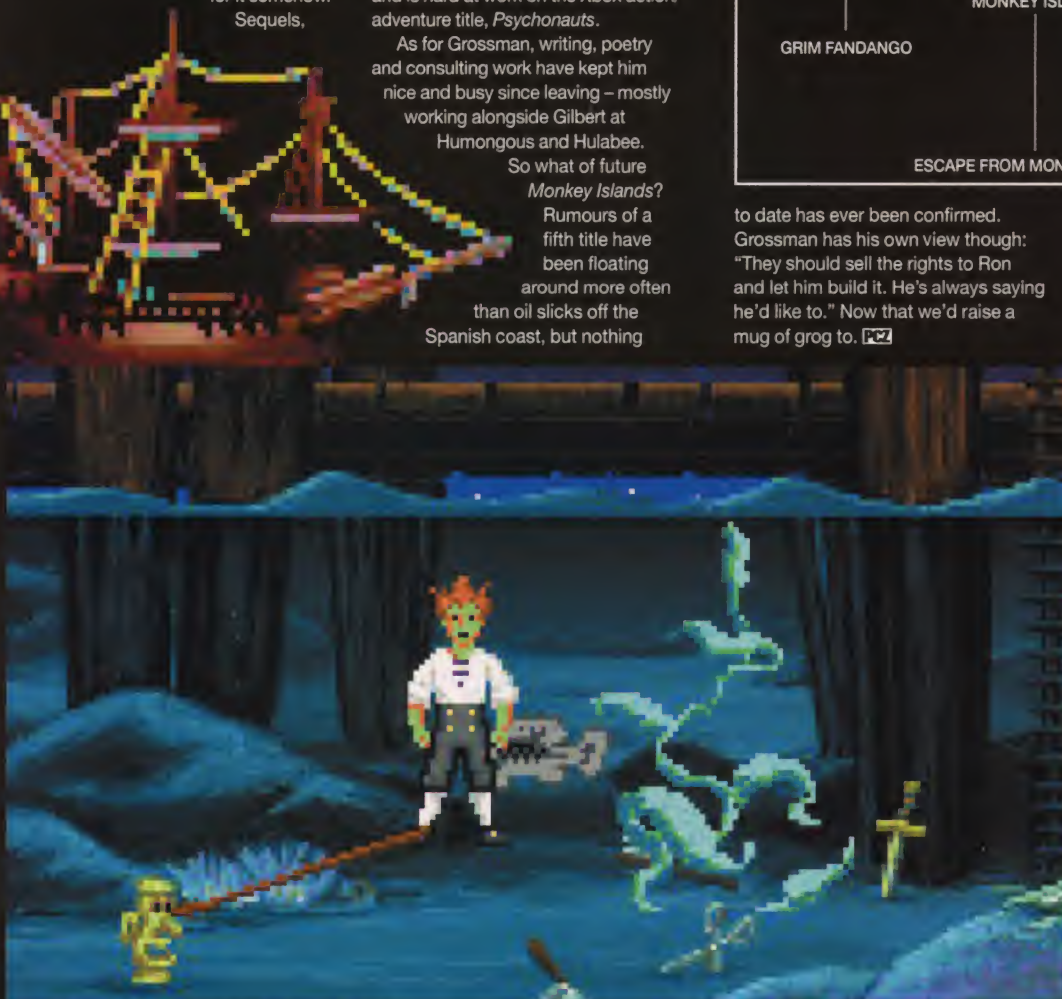
Rumours of a fifth title have been floating around more often than oil slicks off the Spanish coast, but nothing

SWINGING FROM THE MONKEY TREE

MONKEY ISLAND WASN'T THE FIRST IN THE LUCASFILM CANON, BUT IT WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL. THINGS LEARNT DURING THE DEVELOPMENT WOULD TURN UP IN EVERY ADVENTURE GAME CREATED IN ITS WAKE. IT WOULD EVEN INFLUENCE OTHER COMPANIES' TITLES, SUCH AS THE UK'S OWN *BROKEN SWORD* SERIES FROM REVOLUTION SOFTWARE.



to date has ever been confirmed. Grossman has his own view though: "They should sell the rights to Ron and let him build it. He's always saying he'd like to." Now that we'd raise a mug of grog to. ☞



One of the few times you could actually die in the game was when you were stuck underwater.



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